

The Soulbound Princess

by fleets

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Summary: Sequel to Demonbound: After a scuffle with a powerful assassin, Vaati is turned into a Minish and is brought to the brink of death. Zelda saves him by sharing her Triforce, but at a cost: the two now live on borrowed time, and one must eventually die for the other to live. Can they learn to say the things that need to be said before it's too late? VaaSheik [Zelda is Sheik]

1. Transient Peace

fleets: Hi everyone, miss me? Probably not, considering it's only been 3 DAYS since Demonbound Sheikah ended and I started this new story, Soulbound Princess.

Guys I'm really excited about this story, and I hope you are too. I have a few things to say before I start this story. 1.) This story is VaaSheik. Notice I did not say VaaZel. If you want to read a VaaZel by me, I'm going to point you over to When I Return and its sequel, because that one is a VaaZel. While Zelda=Sheik in this story, I do write Sheik differently enough that I think it's a relevant difference (for a more in depth talk on this, I discuss all of this on one of my tumblr posts under 'thewishingcap.').

2.) SHEIK is GENDERED MALE in this story. He prefers male pronouns, and thus will not be referred to as 'she/her' whenever we're talking about him as a character. Don't ask me what's in his pants because that's irrelevant and I don't care. What's important is that he prefers he/him pronouns. I treat him as one (important) facet of Zelda's personality.

That said, some parts will look a lot like VaaZel. Fine. They're the same person after all. But even when she's Zelda, she's still pretty 'Sheiky.' That's where the VaaSheik comes in.

3.) This story is fairly AU. It follows no particular time line, and

pulls in different characters based on certain traits that I found useful/interesting for the story line. Please do not try to correct me about timeline/canon because this is an AU.

4.) If you found yourself here before reading Demonbound Sheikah, you will be very confused as this is a direct sequel.

I think that's all for the ground rules. I promise future AN's won't be so long. Thanks for dropping by and I hope you enjoy this story!

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><p>Chapter 1: Transient Peace

It was late afternoon at Hyrule Castle, and the bustle of visitors had long since died down. With the guards dismissed, only a few people remained in the throne room. A young man sat above on the window's ledges, and he was barely noticeable to the casual passerby as he blended in with the shadows along the walls.

Vaati lazily picked at the dirt under his fingernails as he eavesdropped on the conversation below. He could have easily done the same by letting his sentry eyes, small bat-winged eyes about the size of a nectarine, to spy on them, but he'd come to prefer a more personal touch in the recent months. The skills he'd picked up from Impa and Sheik during his time at the castle had been extremely useful, and he'd learned from them that magic, while powerful, wasn't the answer to everything.

Vaati brushed his pale lavender bangs away from his face and adjusted his cowl. He'd always had a habit of tugging at his hat back when he was the Sorcerer of Winds, and although he no longer wore his hat, his habit of constantly adjusting whatever was on his head persisted.

Thankfully for Hyrule, his habit for trying to conquer the kingdom hadn't. Sheik had long since stopped questioning why, however, when Vaati continued to dodge the topic. Vaati sometimes thought about what Sheik had said to him several months ago, under the summer sun in what had been one of the best days Hyrule had seen in a long time. "I still don't know who you are," Sheik had said, when he couldn't understand why Vaati had remained with the Sheikah after everything they'd done.

Frankly, Vaati wasn't really sure he knew the answer to that, either, especially considering how the Sheikah had mucked up his memories before he'd been put back together again. Once upon a time he'd had a burning drive to conquer Hyrule for his own, to have people kneel at his feet. Sure, he still wondered about that from time to time, but the drive had diminished to mild curiosity. Once upon a time he'd wanted nothing more than to crush the Sheikah and the entire royal family under the heel of his boots, but his interest in that had vanished as well. After all, he enjoyed Sheik's company, which was saying quite a lot considering he'd had few, if any, individuals he'd respected much less enjoy the company of. Sheik was witty, a skilled fighter, and, somewhat surprisingly, valued the same kind of unchained freedom he did.

He'd wondered before whether or not his fierce loyalty to Zelda, one

that had almost been possessive while he'd been 'Gufuu,' had simply been the product of Twinrova's brainwashing. As Gufuu, he'd been fixated on his 'mission' to protect Princess Zelda. However, even after his memories had returned, his feelings hadn't diminished, and ever since then it had filled him with intrigue. His interest in the princess hadn't been something falsely created by Twinrova. It had been real.

He remembered when the princess had first caught his eye. Or, rather, ears. He'd found out that the princesses of the royal family carried with them a great power, comparable to that of the goddesses themselves. He couldn't help but be interested about the person who seemed to have everything he wanted: the crown and raw power.

And when that same person led to his first downfall, to be sealed in the cursed sword, he'd become obsessed. Obsessed with destroying her rather than protecting her, but obsessed all the same.

He'd encountered her again after he'd escaped the Four Sword. She hadn't been the same person as the first one he'd met. She was older. More rugged. Mature. Someone who'd seen far more bloodshed than the one he'd first encountered. However different she was, in many ways she was still the same. She still had the crown. She still had the power.

And once again, just like before, she'd led him to his defeat, though this time by her own hands rather than with the help of the hero. He remembered his heart racing from excitement, excitement to find out what those fierce eyes, sharp like a hawk's, would look like after he'd beat her. And then, he'd lost, his enraged obsession growing before he lost himself in darkness.

Now that he was back to himself again, after spending time with Sheik as Gufuu, his anger had gone but his intrigue remained. He'd had the chance to get to know the princess as more than just an abstract concept. He wasn't obsessed with destroying her, but he couldn't stop thinking about who she was. What she was doing. What made her tick. He and Sheik had gone through so much together that he almost felt like it was his obligation to make sure no one bothered him. Sheik, Zelda, Hyruleâ€!

All of it was his.

Perhaps when he was bored with how life was proceeding he'd pick up where he'd left off with the conquest campaign, but he had plenty of things to do that interested him now.

Red eyes gazed down at the two individuals who were talking below him. Their discussion was becoming increasingly heated as it went on, and Vaati's cowl hid the growing frown on his face. One of them was the young but competent Princess Zelda, and she stood poised in her high-collared pink dress trimmed with gold. The other was her guardian and senior Sheikah, Impa, who could somehow sneak undetected even with her bold blue uniform with red-orange accents.

It was only after spending time with the Sheikah that Vaati truly appreciated Impa's skills. She'd already caught him doing things he technically wasn't supposed to be doing a few times, when he'd been convinced she wouldn't find him. He didn't like to admit it, but he'd been humbled by how much skill could compensate for raw power. He had

power, but not the level of skill Impa and Sheik had that could only be obtained with rigorous training.

"â€œfor the best. And Vaati, why don't you stop eavesdropping and come down to join us?"

The sorcerer flinched when he suddenly heard his name from the conversation below, and then he scowled. How did that woman always know where he was?

Vaati floated down from the window ledge to join Zelda and Impa. He caught Zelda flashing him a quick, exasperated expression as though to say 'Ugh, help.' The sorcerer had always been good at picking up the princess's subtle, nonverbal messages. People thought she wasn't expressive as she often wore a passive, 'proper' mask, but an attentive individual could see that the brief arch of her brow or faint glimmer in her blue eyes actually said quite a lot.

Vaati shot her a devious grin, and then turned to Impa expectantly.

The guardian sighed, and then continued her discussion with Princess Zelda. "At least consider this, princess. You've been running off as Sheik more and more, lately, and poor Daphna has been pretending to be you so much that she might as well be the real princess of Hyrule."

Zelda bit her cheek, and her tired tone suggested that she'd already gone over this conversation at least once before. "I'm still contributing with my efforts to help restore Hyrule. It's not like I go out and do nothing while I'm Sheik." She flashed Vaati a warning look when the sorcerer smirked at this comment. She didn't need Impa to know that, while there were many days where she was making a difference in helping the kingdom, there were also plenty of other days where Vaati had managed to convince her that a day off was exactly what she needed. Bastard had a way with words that was impressively persuasive. "Is it so awful that I want to leave thisâ€œ this life from time to time? I never asked to be the princess, but I try to because I know it has to be me. I try, but I can't do this all the time."

"If I had the crown, I'll let you run off and be Sheik all you want, princess," Vaati winked.

Zelda held back a snicker when Impa looked at them both like an exasperated mother who was looking after two unruly children. "All I am asking is to at least consider this proposal regarding the ball, your grace."

At this, the sorcerer perked up, his back straightening from his normally slouched posture. "A ball?" he asked. He gave a not-so-subtle glance at Zelda standing next to him. He imagined her in a ball gown, something beautiful and exuberant fitting for the occasion, and then he imagined himself in the same ball wearing the kind of rich, high class attire that he hadn't been able to enjoy since he'd relinquished his former throne to join the Sheikah. He decided he was on board with Impa's idea. "That sounds refreshing. Intriguing."

"The people of Hyrule want to host a birthday celebration for her

Grace who would be turning twenty in a week from now," Impa explained, while Zelda looked just about ready to throw her hands up in the air.

"Impa it's not even the people of Hyrule, it's just a bunch of grubby nobles who want to gain my favor," she said.

"And these nobles can help Hyrule with their resources."

Vaati's grin had long since fallen into a frown. "Wait. It's your birthday in a week?" His confident expression with his typical conniving smirk was replaced by one of surprise. "I wasn't told about this," he muttered, clearly offended that he was one of the last ones to know about the princess's birthday.

Zelda pinched the bridge of her nose, irritated that everything seemed to be going wrong at once. "Vaati I'm sorry, I don't really like birthdays and it's really not important to me," she explained, waving her gloved hand defensively, trying to appease him. "So can we please not make this into a big fuss? I have other things to worry about," she added. Vaati was someone who could hold quite a long grudge, and she really didn't want to deal with a sorcerer throwing a hissy fit because she'd forgotten to tell him something that she didn't think was all that important. She watched Vaati, her mouth thinned into an aggravated, thin line. She could tell that, while he wasn't going to press her about this at the moment, he was probably going to be passive aggressive about it later.

She really didn't understand what the big deal was. Since when did he care about things like silly like birthdays?

Oh well. She could always give him a what-for if he was too annoying about it.

"Hyrule is still recovering from extensive damage. If these nobles can be convinced to help, then it can be substantial for recovery efforts," Impa continued, bringing the conversation back on topic.

"They should be helping anywayâ€| without having me bat my lashes at them," Zelda grumbled.

"We shouldn't invite these nobles at all," Vaati agreed, still a little irritated that Zelda hadn't told him about her birthday. "Still, I agree with Impa here, princess. You need to celebrate when you can. Just you and me. I'll treat you."

The princess looked from Vaati to Impa, both of them waiting for her expectantly. "I don't have a choice, do I," she finally said with a sigh and a small smile on her face. "All right, I'll do it. Let the people know that I'll gratefully accept their celebration."

"Waitâ€| what?" Vaati blanched, his smile briefly appearing when he heard her agree, before it flipped upside down into a shocked frown at the mention of others. His hands waved vaguely in the air as though he weren't sure what to do with them, and he looked at Impa and Zelda incredulously. "Did you listen to a word of what I just said?" he asked.

Impa ignored him. "Yes your grace," she gave a small bow to Zelda

before addressing the sorcerer without looking at him. She spoke firmly, "Vaati, you'll join me in the patrols to make sure everything goes smoothly."

"Now hold on just a second," Vaati shook his head, pointing his finger towards the ceiling in an authoritative manner. He strode over to Zelda, annoyed. "You don't have to celebrate with people who don't care about you. It's your birthday, you should-"

The princess held out a hand, stopping him. "Thank you, Vaati, but Impa is right. Hyrule needs me to do this."

"If you want the nobles to help, you know I can be convincing."

Zelda shook her head, her mind already made up. "I don't want you to push it, Vaati, the people think you're dead but if you go too far, even the blind will become suspicious. Your convincing ways have been a bit much sometimes."

Vaati knew what the princess was referring to. Over the last several months, through threats ranging from mild to questionably severe, he'd "convinced" several of Hyrule's wealthy to serve him. He didn't see what the problem was, since he was helping, but Zelda wasn't overly fond of his brash methods. He argued that he got results quickly, while she chided him for being too impatient. He was about to argue, but he could see her point about people becoming suspicious of who he was; it would become a nuisance if word got out that the Sorcerer of Winds hadn't actually died.

The sorcerer's clenched fingers relaxed, but not before he muttered under his breath, "If you think I'm just going to stand there and watch other people leer at you!"

His words didn't go unnoticed by Impa's keen ears. The guardian coughed, and pointed at the door. "Ahem. No one forced you to be a Sheikah, Vaati. The door is over there," she said while he grimaced. Impa added, "However, you may want to stop telling people that you are the princess's personal guard if you leave."

For a moment, Vaati did almost look as though he were going to storm out the door, his red eyes glaring something terrible. However, he caught the princess's gaze and found that he couldn't find it in him to just drop everything and leave. It wasn't fair, really. He couldn't count how many times Sheik got away with things with his tragic puppy eyes.

Like that one time at the Gerudo camp when Vaati had been about to destroy him.

It really put a damper on things when the person you wanted dead insisted that you were their only friend, and looked at you with the most pathetically accepting gaze.

Vaati sighed irritably, and remained where he was, sulking, his arms crossed over his chest and his shoulders somewhat curled.

"Good. Then let's discuss how we'll be organizing this," Impa said.

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While Zelda had been ambivalent about her birthday ball, when the day finally came she found that it might not have been such a bad idea after all. She peered out from her window where she could see the people filing in, mostly the nobles who'd requested the party in the first place, but also some from the middle and lower classes that she'd been able to sneak off invitations to with a lot of help from Vaati. The nobles were undoubtedly going to be miffed that this party wasn't exclusive, but they were just going to have to deal with it.

And looking down from her window, she could see people smiling. They appeared excited, and some of them already had a glow about them from drink. The guards walked around, lighting the hanging lanterns along the walkways as the sun was setting. The people were dressed in reds, silvers, and golds to reflect the approaching autumn. It was heartening to see her people so happy after everything that had happened, after all of the loss they'd had to endure.

There was a knock on her door, and Zelda pulled her gaze away from the window. "Come in!" she called, and she beamed when she saw a familiar face walk in through the door. Vaati, pulled his cowl down further over his face as though annoyed by her excitement. "Hello, Vaati. What's all this about?" she teased, finding it funny how he glowered at the silliest things.

"Just thought I'd drop by before I go and pretend I don't exist to the world for the rest of the night," Vaati muttered bitterly. He looked around, and then walked over to the chair by the window and sat down. For anyone else, Zelda would have been annoyed that they'd made themselves welcome without being invited, but she was used to him doing this by now.

"Vaati, please. I'll know where you are," she rolled her eyes.

"No, you won't."

"You're not that good at hiding from me yet. Maybe when Impa stops finding you, I'll have trouble knowing where you are."

Vaati sighed while the princess wagged a taunting finger in front of his face. After some time, he said flatly. "Fine."

Zelda chuckled. It was the one where she tilted her chin slightly downwards while turning away, the same one Sheik often did to hide his smile behind the cloth he used to cover his face. She walked over to join him by the window again.

"So what do you think?" she asked, spreading her arms out and giving a small twirl. She was wearing a silver, offshoulder dress with barely visible patterns of wing accents. The fabric was soft and floaty like fairy wisps. "Do I look okay?"

Vaati barely turned his head as he continued to stare out the window. "Sure," he said in a bored tone.

"Really, Vaati? Just sure?" Zelda exclaimed indignantly. At least 'good' would have been okay, but sure? So that's how he was going to be, huh? She'd been waiting for him to be completely immature

about the fact that she hadn't told him about her birthday, and apparently he'd decided that the day to be a child about it would be on that very day. She wasn't all that surprised that he was still, after an entire week, miffed that she hadn't told him about her birthday, but he was being a real deku nut about it.

"Well someone's fishing for compliments. Why don't you go ask your noble friends instead of me?" Vaati snapped, while Zelda only arched a brow at him, unimpressed.

Zelda was used to this by now. After the whole ordeal with Dethl, she'd learned that, while Fuu had been almost childlike in innocence, Vaati was like the brat kid who egged people's houses for fun. Basically a manchild who expected things to always go their way, and dramatically sulked about it when they didn't.

Before Zelda could say anything, the sorcerer shook his head irritably. "Ugh, just. Here." He tossed a small object towards Zelda, who caught it out of the air. She opened her fingers, and in her palm was a beautiful red gem shaped like a teardrop, and about the size of a pearl. It reflected different shades of reds and even faint purples in the light, like a cat's eye. The stone hung from a thin silver chain.

"Happy birthday," Vaati mumbled, drumming his fingers along the table distractedly while Zelda brought the necklace closer to her face.

"It's so pretty!" she murmured, and then walked over to the mirror on the other side of the room to try it on.

"That's not all it is. It's enchanted. Whenever you need help, just say the words 'tekesuta reku,'" the sorcerer explained, almost hurried and embarrassed. "I'll come find you."

Zelda admired her reflection in the mirror, and she was speechless for a few seconds, unsure of what to say. Vaati was one of her best friends now, but she'd never pegged him as the caring type. He always scoffed at anything that could even remotely be construed as 'soft.' This was all the funnier considering he'd once been the most terrifying individual in the world. "Vaati I don't know what to say. This is so thoughtful of you," she finally managed.

"Use that if anyone tries to grope you today, alright?" Vaati said sharply.

At this, Zelda laughed. So that's what this was about? She knew there was an agenda in all of this somewhere. "I can handle them, don't you worry," she said with a smile, showing off a frighteningly swift jab that would have instantly broken the jaw of any poor soul unlucky enough to approach her the wrong way.

Vaati didn't sound convinced. "I don't doubt that, but—"

"Promise me you won't cause a scene?" She shushed him, holding up a finger. When Vaati looked like he was about to argue, she curled her fingers into a fist. Their secret 'Sheikah' hand sign. "For me."

Vaati's nose twitched, and his brow crinkled like he was fighting

some kind of internal struggle. Finally, he threw his hands up in the air in exasperation and bumped his fist with hers. Then, he stood up from his chair and strode over to the door to make his exit.

"Vaati."

The sorcerer stopped. He turned his head slightly to acknowledge that he'd heard her.

"Thank you," Zelda smiled.

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There's a certain haunting atmosphere that settles just as the sun is about to set. The world seems to hold its breath, and then it sighs as night falls and the lords of darkness patrol the new, sunless domain.

The night is a world for dangerous folk. Thieves love it as their accomplice, assassins thrive under their cover. And tonight, a servant of night had decided to lurk among the crowd of people gathering at the castle to celebrate the birthday of the Princess of Light. They were an assassin, waiting for a chance to hunt their prey.

They had broad shoulders, suggesting male under the cowl and long cloak that hid their features. Although he was tall, he moved with a low crouch that masked his true height, and he was lithe and light on his feet like a cat. His attire was a dusky black that allowed them to blend in with the darkness, and beneath the cloak revealed a fitted outfit with a blue symbol, a perfect circle, that vaguely resembled an open eye. Daggers and bombs hung from his wastes, but they quickly disappeared from view as the cloak settled over his frame.

The assassin slowly stalked the side of the castle walls, expertly avoiding the notice of the patrolling guards. He sat crouched beside shrubbery some distance away from the main gates of the castle. A brief flicker of light reflected from his eyes behind the cowl as he looked up at the rising crescent moon to gauge the time.

And then, he waited.

He'd been waiting for an opportunity like this for years. He was a patient man.

Hyrule had enjoyed peace for something close to five months. Regrettably, peace was a transient commodity.

* * *

><p>fleets: just a bit of something fluffy before i destroy it all to pieces, yeah? That might have looked a bit shippy to some of you, but they're more like besties at this point. Good besties. REally good besties (wiggles eyebrows). cough... anyway.</p>

Let me know what you think! :D I hope you guys like it so far!

2. The Uninvited Guest

fleets: i wasn't sure if i wanted to keep going or not, but i felt like the break was more appropriate here so

>TAKE THIS SUPER EARLY UPDATE? can't stop won't stop gonna burn out soon but i don't care yeah (was supposed to burn out 10 chapters ago in demonbound but)<p>

Also thank you guys for keeping up with this (kind of sort of) insane updating schedule. I can't tell you how grateful I am for those of you who show up to review again and again despite the fact that i keep posting these one right after the other ;w;

* * *

><p>Chapter 2: The Uninvited Guest

Ten minutes since they'd opened the doors to the public, the castle was lively with music and conversation. People were beginning to come inside, and while the high class, easily identifiable with their gaudy and extra glittery attire, initially regarded the middle and lower classes with disdain, they eventually came around with the distraction of food, drink, and music. It wasn't crowded yet, but with more and more people appearing every minute, it was clear that the castle was eventually going to be packed with people.

Vaati sighed, watching the party below from his perch on the window ledge. More people meant more work for him to make sure that there were no suspicious characters about. Zelda hadn't made her appearance yet, and he didn't blame her. She'd once confided that she disliked crowds and social events, and looking at the crowd below that was only growing larger, he couldn't really see how she would enjoy this ball at all.

Vaati's ears pricked when he heard someone approach, and Impa gracefully climbed up to where he was to join him. A few weeks ago he might not have noticed her sneak up on him, but he'd gotten fairly good at picking up the barely audible tells of her approach.

"How is everything?" She asked, and she settled against the wall of the window pane next to him. It was difficult to tell from her tone whether she was asking how he was, or if he'd seen anything unusual so far. Ever since Vaati had recovered his memories, he had a nagging feeling that the older Sheikah wanted to talk to him about something, but didn't know how to start that conversation.

Vaati shrugged his shoulders in response, before going back to his sullen silence.

Impa nodded, her reserved expression difficult to read. For a moment her shoulders moved as though she were about to go somewhere else, but for whatever reason, she decided to stay for a little longer. The two of them watched the people enjoying themselves below without so much as saying a word to each other.

Sometime later, the princess appeared. She didn't make a grand entrance about it, just like her style, and instead blended in immediately among the crowd, shaking hands where needed and throwing on a bright smile while occasionally nodding in agreement to some conversation nearby. It was surprising how Zelda looked like a

completely different person while she mingled with the attendees; from her exaggerated, somewhat bubbly mannerisms and her outgoing smile, no one would have expected that she was really quite reserved, and enjoyed solitude more than company.

"I know you're upset that I pressed her to do this, Vaati," Impa said after a while. She'd been so quiet and still this whole time that anyone who wasn't used to her would have forgotten that she'd been there.

Vaati stirred, whatever thoughts he'd been lost in interrupted. "I didn't say anything," he replied, and he took a moment to stretch his arms. Not a single person noticed the two Sheikah watching them from above.

Impa's lips curled up in a small smile. "It's written across your face," she said, and then she uncrossed her arms from her chest and sat down next to Vaati. Her elbows were propped against her thighs and she sat hunched forward, pensive, as the violins from the orchestra struck a note. She rubbed her fingers together for a few seconds as though carefully trying to pick the words she wanted to say, and then eventually spoke in a contemplative whisper as though afraid someone aside from them might hear. "I never knew how to say this, but let me say it now. Thank you."

Beside her, the sorcerer continued to watch the princess dancing, her dress billowing as she twirled. His expression was an unreadable mask, but there was a ghost of an arch in his eyebrows that suggested surprise by Impa's words. His response was silence, as though to inquire for an explanation.

Below them, Zelda glanced up at where they were sitting. Her bright blue eyes locked with theirs for a few seconds, indicating that she knew where they were, before she went back to mingle and gain some favors with the nobles. Her smile lingered a little longer knowing that Impa and Vaati were there.

"For as long as I could remember, the princess never had any real friends," Impa said softly. "I've been somewhat of a parental figure ever since her parents passed, when she was but a child too young to remember. I am not a friend, but a guardian."

Vaati shifted his weight uncomfortably at the mention of parents. He'd always wondered how Zelda had ended up ruling a kingdom by herself at such a young age, and she'd never mentioned anything about her parents. Vaati, too, had no memories of his own. Well, perhaps that wasn't entirely true. He disliked thinking about them, and so he never thought about them. He supposed they'd existed, once.

A vague image of when he'd been young passed his mind, of someone holding his hand as they led him along, his hands tiny in theirs. Then, they pushed him through a magnificent white door and it closed with a thud behind him. The doorâ€œ the door was somehow important. Special. He could never put a finger on the significance it held, but he was sure that it was no ordinary door.

Then his hands were empty, the fingers slipping away, and all he had left was the feeling that he had no one to wait for, because they were never coming back.

Rage flared briefly as he thought about the parents he barely remembered, creatures who'd only caused him bitterness and grief. He didn't realize that his knuckles were white from clenching his fists at the memory he thought he'd let go. His gaze, cold like steel, finally looked up towards Impa who hadn't seemed to notice his sudden stiffness. Or, if she did, she pretended not to.

He sighed, grateful that for once, Impa's keen eyes didn't catch his sudden change in mood. He shook away his wearisome thoughts, and instead wondered why Zelda never talked about her parents. He thought he already knew why, as he and Sheik were similar in this regard; they carried their burdens and victories alone.

He thought about the fight against Dethl at the Palace of Winds, and his expression softened.

Some things had changed, perhaps.

"I admit I was concerned when I heard your memories had returned. I thought that you were only biding your time to wreak havoc on Hyrule once again. However," Impa paused, her tone tinged with surprise. She seemed to take a moment to gather her thoughts again, and then chuckled softly to herself, shaking her head. She waved a hand at the Zelda below. "I've never seen the princess so happy, even after all that's happened. You can support her where I cannot. Where I must advise her regarding what's best for her as the Princess of Hyrule, you can advise her regarding what's best for her as, well,"

"Sheik," Vaati completed. The one who was free, without all of the titles that weighed their wings down.

Impa nodded, and the two fell to contemplative silence again. The orchestra thrummed with an uplifting tune, and Zelda looked up at them again, this time with a sincere smile other than the plastic mask she reserved for those she wasn't close to. The princess rolled her eyes at the young man who was trying to catch her attention next to her before she flashed a quick wink towards Vaati, causing a tiny smirk to appear on the sorcerer's face.

"It is nice to see she finally has someone her age to talk to," Impa chuckled when she saw Zelda's unspoken message.

At this, Vaati looked up sharply. He scoffed, brushing his bangs aside. "I am much older than you think. Even older than you." The sorcerer leaned back against the window, his head tilted with an amused sneer.

There was a knowing twinkle in the older Sheikah's eyes. It reminded Vaati of how she'd looked at him back when she'd challenged him to beat Sheik during training months ago. "You are still young and inexperienced," she declared.

Vaati wondered how many people actually knew about Impa's overbold attitude. Although she didn't say much and tended to observe more than speak, Vaati thought of her as the type of person who quietly judged people, and would later embarrass people she didn't like with slick, insightful one-liners.

The sorcerer's sneer fell, the Sheikah's toying expression annoying him. He sat up, leaning forward in a challenge. "I will forgive your

ignorance once, Impa, but I am over a thousand years old. Hardly what you would call 'young' and 'inexperienced.'"

Impa was unfazed by the sorcerer, and she simply watched him with her discerning gaze. She watched him until the sorcerer fought the urge to fidget under her judgment. Then, her chest rose and fell, a sigh, and she looked at him in a way that caught him off guard.

With pity.

"How many of those thousand years have you actually lived, Vaati?" she asked quietly.

"Iâ€œ|" Vaati started, but he couldn't find the rest of the retort he'd prepared. His red eyes wandered behind the cowl, confused, and then he looked down when he couldn't give her an answer. He fell to sullen silence, his arms folding over his waist and his chin tucked down as he considered Impa's words some more. For a moment he almost looked like a normal young man trying to figure out where he was going in life, rather than the former tyrant-sorcerer-turned-Sheikah that he now was.

Zelda's guardian gave him a sympathetic nod, though she didn't press for his answer. She knew she'd gotten her point across. "I don't know what happened in your past, but I've watched you for some time and I can tell: you never had the chance to grow up."

"You dareâ€œ|" Vaati growled, but it was half-hearted unlike his usual snarl. He wanted to tell her that she was wrong, but he wasn't able to find the words to object. They both knew that she was right.

"I mean no offense in it, just an observation. You are not the only one here who wasn't able to enjoy a conventional upbringing," Impa added, not without kindness in her voice. She turned her head away, giving the sorcerer some privacy with his own thoughts. Then, she pushed herself up onto her feet.

"Well, the crowd has certainly grown. I will go and check the courtyard for anything suspicious," she said.

Vaati continued to sit, buried in his thoughts, even as Impa left to make her rounds. Once he was sure that she was gone, he sighed loudly, pulling the cowl further over his face in aggravation. How dare Impa talk to him like she actually knew who he was, what he'd gone through?

And how dare she be right?

Vaati shook his head.

No. No she was wrong.

The wind mage dragged his fingers across his face with another sigh. While he regarded Impa with some level of respect, he couldn't help but be apprehensive whenever she was around. If he was around her for too long she was going to dig up parts of his past that had no business being exposed.

Vaati stood up and paced along the window sill to clear his mind of the previous conversation. Then, he realized that Zelda was looking

at him with a raised eyebrow, which he understood as a commentary regarding how bad a Sheikah he was being, for being so noticeable. If he paced any harder, surely he would start a fire with his heels and cause the entire crowd to look at him.

With a scowl, he forced himself to stop pacing and instead glared at the people who were, unlike him, having a nice time at the party.

And that was when he noticed someone else looking at him.

A pair of red eyes, watching him.

Vaati turned his head sharply in the direction from where he'd sensed the gaze, and he felt a chill run down his neck when their eyes met.

It was a person who'd been blending in with the shadows along the walls on the far side of the room. They were wearing a simple, dusty black cloak and their face was hidden by the hood. They could have been a middle class guest who hadn't been able to find something better to wear for the occasion, as there were plenty of people in the crowd who'd arrived wearing something modest. However Vaati couldn't shake the feeling that this person was someone who hadn't been invited.

He'd sensed their panic when their eyes had met, as though he'd caught them in the middle of some malign plot. Furthermore, despite his agitated pacing from before, he still would have been rather difficult to spot from the untrained eye, and yet this individual had managed to find him just as quickly as Zelda had.

Who was this person?

The stranger's eyes darted away, and they stood up from where they had been hiding in the shadows and dusted themselves off as though they hadn't seen Vaati at all. Their nonchalant demeanor almost had the sorcerer second guessing himself, but his intuition had always served him quite well, and right now it was screaming at him to keep an eye on this individual.

Vaati jumped up, away from the window sill where he'd been sitting, and hovered up above the chandeliers and against the ceiling of the banquet hall. Few people expected anyone to be floating by the ceiling, which made it a perfect place to hide. Even against those who were trained in the art of sneaking wouldn't expect him there since not many people knew magic like he did.

The sorcerer followed the individual as they casually picked a fruit tart from a tray. For the next twenty minutes or so, they continued to act just like any other visitor at the castle. They munched on the tart while they enjoyed the music, and occasionally joined in on a nearby conversation.

Just when Vaati was going to decide that his intuition about this individual had been wrong, and that there was nothing suspicious about them, he saw them flash a look towards where he'd been hiding earlier, by the window. It had been brief, and just barely noticeable, but Vaati knew that what he saw had been real.

This character was checking to see if Vaati was still watching them.

His suspicion rose, but Vaati wasn't completely convinced that this person wasn't just looking at the window sill simply because he had made them nervous earlier. He had to be sure.

Vaati's eyes glowed as he summoned some sentry eyes who he stationed near the ceiling where he was currently hovering. He had them watch the suspicious individual, and then teleported back down to the second floor walkway that circled above the banquet hall. He stood in the shadow of a pillar, hidden enough so that he would be easily missed by the untrained eye, but noticeable by a trained one.

Then, Vaati turned his back to the suspicious individual to look at some other people on the other side of the room, and he waited.

The answer revealed itself much sooner than he'd anticipated.

While his own eyes could not see what the suspicious individual was doing, the sentry eyes that he'd left near the ceiling showed him everything he needed to know.

This character wasn't just some ordinary middle class person who came to enjoy the party.

This was someone who was trained in subterfuge.

Through the sentry eyes, Vaati saw the person's gaze do a quick sweep of the room before they landed on him, watching him with that same, searching look. The stranger glanced at him several times, as though to make sure that Vaati was no longer following their movements. Once convinced that Vaati had lost interest in them, they set down their half-finished fruit tart on a nearby table. They then began to make their way towards the set of doors that led to the stairs leading further inside the castle.

A grin bloomed on Vaati's face as the uninvited guest expertly disappeared through the door like a true shadow warrior. No matter how well they hid in the shadows, however, they could not escape the watch of Vaati's sentry eyes.

I've got you.

* * *

><p>fleets: ughhhh i know i didn't proof well at all but i couldn't help it i just had to submit a;skdjf<p>

Anyone notice the 'gonna talk about Vaati's past later' setup? I'm really excited to get into his backstory again because I haven't really done that since Tainted Heart, a suuuper old story by me that desperately needs updating. I have a few twists that are hopefully exciting :)

>Relatedly, I'm falling back on my 'antihero Vaati' characterization this time! It's the one that's worked best for me, historically, and I've kind of given up on 'disgustingly evil bastard Vaati.' I mean, I tried. In demonbound if you'd believe it. It didn't pan out at all lmao<p>

asdlkfja;sldfj i can't wait until this story actually really starts and it's killing me i have to get through a bunch of other chapters first AUGH

**RayHollows: **Oh snap I actually got Zelda's dress off of a reference pic. I should post it somewhere soon when I remember :o

>My headcanon is that Vaati is more like a brat than a suave gent because he was just a bratchild during MC. Then he gets sealed up and, well, kiddo never really went through the 'grew up to be a respectable adult' phase xD<p>

**Serpent Tailed Angel: **So happy we're in agreement! He is just a angry sulky doofball :3
>We'll get there soon ;)<p>

**Lunamew: **;akjsdf me too! And yesss you caught the references to his self-imposed title at the end of demonbound! xD
>And yeah that was Minish! I'm surprised you caught that, too :D I'm using the Japanese version of Minish since it's actually based on a real language than a lot of random pico pico noises haha. YES SMUSH THEIR FACES TOGETHER<p>

**Reily96: **(_intense eyebrow wiggling_). hahaha we'll get there. I mean, they're practically a ship already they just don't realize/admit that yet. Prepare for some severe heartache along the way, however, as I don't intend to make this easy or smooth sailing. :D

**Ai Star: **Thanks! And yup, the trouble is only getting closer! Hahahaha yeah Vaati holds the worst kind of grudges xD

**AquilaMage: **As I wrote in Demonbound, Vaati doesn't do subtle hahaha
>Ruined birthday incoming in one... two...<p>

**plum: **Hey there hey! So good to see you back here again plum :D
>I'm glad you liked the ending of Demonbound, and expect to see some more Ravio and Shadow in this story, too (would be a shame if I forgot them!)
ANd oh god i don't know what i'm doing to myself because it's 3 in the morning and I should not have this chapter up already x_x

**Vesperupus: **It's out! With a wtf updating schedule so far! (i need to slow down because i'm going to burn out i just know it)
>I cannot tell you how much I enjoyed writing salty af Vaati. He holds a mean, mean grudge too :P
I have all different flavors of heartache lined up, hope you got some painkillers with you :D (i should start sending cards with that 'before there's a rainbow, there's always rain' message out to people)

3. A Goddess's Wish

fleets: So uh, I thought update speed would slow down a little since I just got Hyrule Warriors, but the game ended up inspiring me instead so. Here we are. Another update.

* * *

><p>Chapter 3: A Goddess's Wish

The suspicious individual was quiet and fast, and Vaati had to admit that he was impressed by how they effortlessly slid past the guards and castle servants. Jealousy bubbled in his chest when he thought about how they moved with the skill of Impa and Sheik: something he still hadn't mastered because of his lack of practice. However, this was only further proof that this individual had been exposed to extensive training similar to the Sheikah's, and Vaati was certain that they were up to no good.

He couldn't get a good look at their features aside from the fact that their eyes were red: their face was covered by a hood, and a cloth scarf hid their features below their nose. At the very least, he guessed that they were male based on the broad-shouldered silhouette, but even that was vague due to the cloak that covered most of their body. Initially he thought they were of average height, but upon further observation he discovered that their true height was disguised by the fact that they moved in a low crouch most of the time.

The sorcerer followed them carefully, having his sentry eyes track them from a distance so that they wouldn't be discovered. Once or twice he was afraid he'd lost them since they seemingly just melted into the shadows, but his sentries were persistent and eventually, managed to follow them to Zelda's bedroom.

He almost burst through the doors in anger as soon as he'd saw the man go into Zelda's room, but he stopped himself; he would only allow the intruder to escape if he barged in recklessly. Vaati observed the man with his sentry eyes, and he saw him sneak about, lifting the bedsheets and checking behind wardrobes as though to find a good place to hide. While he couldn't tell what the man's motive was for hiding in the princess's bedroom, Vaati had caught a gleam of daggers hanging from the man's hip, and he knew that the man meant Zelda harm.

With a growl, Vaati ordered his sentries to take position along all possible escape routes so the intruder wouldn't be able to slip away. The man whirled around when he finally noticed the glowing red eyes of the sentries surrounding him in a circle, and the sorcerer saw his eyes widen behind the hood as he stepped inside the room.

"On your knees," Vaati ordered as he walked towards the intruder in slow, deliberate steps. "Now."

The man observed him for a few seconds, his eyes lingering on the Sheikah symbol on Vaati's chest, and then the sorcerer heard an indignant huff. The stranger's voice was rough around the edges and worn with time like the mountains across the desert. "So the Sheikah announce their presence these days, do they?" he asked, and Vaati couldn't help but notice the bitter resentment at the word 'Sheikah.'

"I prefer to savor the last moments of those I hunt before I beat them," Vaati returned a menacing smile. "Now, I suggest you kneel before I break your legs."

Rather than comply, the man straightened from his crouch to his full

height. He was imposingly tall, about as tall as Impa. Red eyes narrowed behind the cowl. "And how arrogant you've become," he whispered. Then, he gave one, slow nod towards something behind Vaati. "Kill him."

The sorcerer whirled around at the order, caught by surprise that he'd allowed someone to sneak up behind him. He brought his hands up to defend himself against whatever it was that was about to attack him. Rather than an attack, however, he came face to face with absolutely nothing.

Upon realizing what had happened, he turned back around only to find that the suspicious man had closed the distance between them and was rushing at him with a dagger. Did I just

He was ashamed. So ashamed.

I did. I just fell for the oldest trick in the book

The man dug his weapon into Vaati's neck, but to his surprise it was only an afterimage. The real Vaati had teleported behind him, and the sorcerer couldn't help but smirk a little; he'd learned a few tricks after sparring with Sheik, and he'd gotten much, much faster at casting evasive spells than before. Vaati quickly charged a sphere of energy and fired it at the man.

The man managed to dodge most of the blast, but it nicked his side which was enough to send him crashing into the table on the other side of the room. When Vaati approached the broken splinters of wood, the man expertly threw his remaining daggers at the sorcerer's head before jumping back onto his feet. Vaati stopped the daggers with a flick of his wrists, summoning a gust that caused the blades to clatter harmlessly to the floor before they reached their target.

"You fight like—" Vaati began, but was cut short when he realized he was surrounded by three copies of the man.

Illusions?

Fire erupted around him, obscuring his vision. Irritated, the sorcerer swatted the flames away and looked around for his foe. He summoned a small whirlwind around himself, blowing up several pieces of furniture into the air along with the mysterious man who'd been trying to go in for the kill while Vaati had been blinded by flames.

The wind mage strode over to the stunned man who was trying to steady himself against a chair. Vaati grabbed him by the neck and slammed him against the wall nearby, and his free hand was pointed at the man and crackling with magic, threatening to unleash a painful spell should his captive struggle. "You fight like a Sheikah," the sorcerer observed.

Vaati watched the other man glare at him with the ferocity of a desert storm. Again, the same bitterness seemed to be triggered by the word 'Sheikah,' and Vaati could tell that the man held his bitterness close; whatever grudge he had with the Sheikah was personal.

The sorcerer couldn't help but wonder what kind of relationship the man had with the secretive tribe. After all, Vaati still knew next to nothing about the Sheikah, and neither Impa nor Sheik seemed to like talking about them to outsiders, including himself. He understood that Impa's acceptance of him as an 'honorary' Sheikah was a big deal and a great honor, but he would still be considered an outsider.

Vaati had a feeling that this stranger knew far more about the Sheikah than he did, and the question he'd had earlier when he'd first seen him at the ball resurfaced in his mind: Just who was this person?

"Where did you learn to fight like that?" Vaati asked, though his somewhat bored tone suggested that he knew the stranger wouldn't answer. He shrugged when, as expected, the man kept his silence and continued to glare.

"I suppose I can beat it out of you later," he said, bringing his face just a hair closer, a dangerous smile playing on his lips. His fingers crackled with magic as he brought them to the man's forehead, and he whispered, "To Stone With You."

Zing!

The rebound startled Vaati, sending the sorcerer stumbling backwards. Open-mouthed in surprise, he stared at the man with confusion blossoming on his face. His fingers tingled from the backfiring spell, and he rubbed them slowly in shock.

No one had ever stopped his magic so completely like that before.

And then, Vaati noticed that something weird was going on with the man's face. Or rather, around the man's face. The air flickered over the man's cowl, and something solid began to materialize around it. A stone mask shimmered into existence over the man's head, and it appeared demonic and ancient, with four tall horn-like protrusions on either side of it. A single stone eye carved on the left side of its 'face' stared out at him blankly.

For the first time in a long time, the Sorcerer of Winds actually felt mortality. The power emanating from the mask was crushing, and Vaati had to fight to keep his fingers from shaking involuntarily under its influence.

It was then that he finally knew who this man was. He was someone not unlike him, someone who had achieved the power of the Gods themselves.

Feeling something close to fear, Vaati tried to transform into his most powerful form, Wrath. However, while his fingers momentarily changed into monstrous black claws, they abruptly changed back. The sorcerer's brows furrowed in confusion, and then a horrible realization dawned on him when he found that their positions had reversed, and it was now he who was caught in the man's grasp. Instead, he was now caught, trapped within the man's hands wrapped around his arms, and his knees were pushed to the ground as he was quickly overpowered.

"_Kneel._"

Though Vaati fought to stay standing, he could feel his own power leaving him, siphoned out of him through the man's fingertips until he fell to the floor. His hands around the man's arms fell limp and he struggled to remain conscious. _Thisâ€¢| this is patheticâ€¢|_

He'd grossly underestimated this man's power.

His perception became vague, and lights flashed before his eyes, bringing with them flickers of disoriented visions. He saw the one-eyed mask stare at him like it was searching his soul, and then the eye became painted red into the Sheikah symbol. His vision flickered again, sending him back in time and he was now looking at the princess of Hyrule, all frozen as stone, and his own hands were stretched out towards her as he stole the Light Force out of her.

Another flicker, and in his hands was a red cap with a glittering, blood colored jewel embedded in its frame. The cap was dyed from red to a deep purple while it sat between his fingers. The cap that had started it all.

The flickering stopped as abruptly as it had started, and Vaati clutched his chest as a sharp pain seared through his body. His pain was so great that he barely noticed that his hands were more like paws, now, and that the masked man was towering over him like an enormous tree overshadowing him.

He had trouble breathing like his lungs were getting crushed between iron plates, and he couldn't figure out what was going on. As Vaati fell to the floor, he saw the masked man stumble backwards with his hands clutching his head as though suffering from a severe migraine. The mask disappeared, and the man braced himself against the wall, winded.

Vaati fought to move his increasingly unresponsive body towards the door. His mistake of underestimating his opponent had left him outmatched, and as much as he didn't want to admit it, he needed to retreat. It was then that he noticed, _really_ noticed for the first time, that something was very wrong with him.

Everything towered above him, and the door was no longer ten steps away but several dozens of steps away. His fingers, or rather paws, were covered in short fur, and he felt a new sensory input extending from his back like an extra limb. A tail.

Between labored breaths and trying to figure out how to get out of this situation alive, a horrific realization dawned on Vaati. His mind almost shut down right then and there, with half of him screaming in denial, and the other half shocked into silence from terrified acceptance. He was no longer the Sorcerer of Winds, but a small, mousy creature no larger than a thumb.

He'd been turned back into a Minish.

No, no that wasn't the only thing. Judging from how he was wearing the very same clothes he'd been wearing on the day he'd stolen the powerful Wishing Cap to become the Wind Mage Vaati, the masked man hadn't simply turned him back into Minish. He'd taken all of the

power Vaati had gained through the Wishing Cap. The man had undone the wish.

The intruder, no longer wearing the demonic mask, had apparently recovered from his headache from using the powerful artifact and was slowly making his way to where Vaati lay. As the man approached, the sorcerer tried to speak through his pain.

Who are you? he asked, a final request, but his throat was clamped and he couldn't make a sound.

He knew this was it. He could feel his body failing him and there was nothing he could do about it.

Vaati watched the man standing over him, and the sorcerer's lips were pulled back in a grimaced snarl, both from the pain in his chest as well as from anger. It enraged him to think that his life would end like this, without knowing just who or what he'd been fighting. It enraged him to think that the Wind Mage's last moments would be as a pathetic Minish, and all because of an arrogant mistake. His anger pushed back the pain when he thought about Zelda, thought about Sheik, and the danger they were in. If he died here!

At the very least, they were more cautious than he was: they won't make the same mistake he made.

"Who's there?"

Vaati's head snapped towards the door. Princess Zelda was standing in the doorway, and her sharp blue eyes immediately darted around the broken furniture, to him, and then to the cloaked man. With quick judgment, she grabbed a letter opener that had fallen near her feet, and she dashed towards the intruder with the sharp blade in one hand and the other charged with magic.

She wasn't fast enough, however, and the intruder leapt towards the window, shattering it, and then swiftly disappeared into the night.

Zelda hesitated in front of the broken window, as though wondering if she should give chase. However, she turned around when she remembered the strange, tiny creature on the floor.

Vaati watched the princess kneel in front of him, his eyelids heavy. He couldn't really feel the pain anymore. In fact, he couldn't really feel anything anymore, and everything was numb. Before he lost consciousness, he had to tell her. He had to tell her what had happened to him, where Vaati had gone.

With one last grimace, the Minish sorcerer held out a paw that was curled into a tiny fist. He smiled when he saw recognition pass over Zelda's face, and then he blacked out.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Earlier, Princess Zelda had noticed Vaati sneaking off out of the banquet hall. She'd caught him with a determined glint in his eye, like he'd caught someone making trouble and was going to make them regret their life choices.

Zelda knew all too well that Vaati almost always got himself in trouble whenever he had that look. His arrogance got the best of him, and he would always slip up, make some silly mistake, and get into deep water.

Out of concern, she'd slipped away from the ball to follow him from a distance. She'd lost him a few times, but eventually heard noises coming from her room. She was sure Vaati was there as she thought she'd heard his voice, but rather than finding the sorcerer, she encountered a strange hooded man who looked roughed up like he'd been fighting someone, her room in complete shambles, and a small, mouse-like creature wearing tiny purple robes.

Now, the man had gone, and she was left with the tiny creature that was lying limp on the floor, struggling to breathe. There was something wrong with it, like it was injured, but she couldn't see any external damage anywhere. More disconcerting, however, was the fact that the creature seemed familiar to her. She couldn't shake the feeling that this wasn't the first time she'd encountered it.

And then, it had looked up at her with those same, determined red eyes that she'd seen earlier, and it weakly held out a paw into a fist before it fell unconscious from exhaustion.

Zelda's breath caught in her throat, and a chill ran down her neck when she realized what she was looking at. Who she was looking at. Afraid, she knelt down beside the Minish and her voice wavered as she said hoarsely, "Vaati?"

He didn't respond.

She tried nudging him, careful not to hurt him as he was so small. No response. Her panic grew when she noticed that she couldn't see the rise and fall of his chest, or any signs of breathing.

She wanted to believe that this wasn't actually Vaati, but it had to be him. As soon as he'd held out his fist, she knew: that was their special greeting, reserved for each other and no one else. That, and the fact that this creature had features that were similar to the sorcerers — like the light purple hair, the purple motif, and the red eyes that were mischievously arrogant — and she was convinced that this was Vaati. She had no idea how or why he'd been turned into a fragile creature that looked more like a mouse than a human, but she knew that he needed help, and quickly.

Forcing her hands to stop shaking, Zelda stood up abruptly and began to rummage around her room, wildly searching for one of her summoning necklaces. She slammed open the drawers of her desk while shoving aside the mess of inkwells and papers onto the floor. Zelda tried to keep herself together as she snatched a necklace with a small blue stone. She had no idea what had happened here in the last hour, but Vaati desperately needed her help and she couldn't afford to melt down in panic.

"Please help me," Zelda whispered, and there was a brief flash from the stone in her hands.

Seconds later, there was another flash, and a small ball of pink-tinted light appeared before her. It hovered on two pairs of wings, and upon closer inspection, the outline of a tiny person could

be seen within the orb of light.

It was a fairy, one that had been assigned to protect the royal family in cases of emergency. While Vaati wasn't technically a part of the royal family, he was a friend of it, and this was an emergency.

"There," she pointed at the unconscious Minish on the floor when the fairy waited for her expectantly, seemingly confused because the princess appeared unharmed. "Please," Zelda stressed, when the fairy flitted around uncertainly when it realized that it was being asked to help some stranger unrelated to its charge.

Zelda held her breath when the fairy eventually flew down to investigate the Minish. The tiny sliver of hope that she clung to dimmed and vanished when the fairy fluttered back over to her rather than help Vaati. The fairy stammered in response to the princess's expression of shattered hope.

"I-I apologize, Princess Zelda. I cannot help him." The fairy flitted in an agitated manner when it noticed the princess's eyes wander in increasing panic. "Fairy magic can heal wounds as long as the individual isâ€| is alive."

He's dead? Zelda froze. Time seemed to stop, and she couldn't believe what she was hearing. NO. No that can't beâ€|

The fairy continued, anticipating Zelda's next question. "We can only heal mortal wounds immediately after they occur. Not even my magic can help his situation, Princess Zelda. It would take the power of the goddesses themselves to bring someone back from the dead."

The princess slumped backwards, her knees giving under her weight and she sat helplessly on the floor. Her mind was an incoherent mess, and she couldn't understand what the fairy was telling her. Vaati couldn't be dead. She was just talking to him earlier, a few hours ago, and he'd been his usual, petulant yet oddly endearing self. She remembered asking him for his opinion on how she looked, she remembered seeing him watching over the ball with Impa, she rememberedâ€| she rememberedâ€|

He couldn't be dead.

This was Vaati, the Sorcerer of Winds they were talking about. He wasn't the type of person to go down so easily. He wasn't the type of person to just roll over and die in some forgettable manner. This wasn't right. This was impossible. This wasn't how things should end.

At the same time, a part of her knew what was rational and true. Death was the great equalizer: it didn't matter what class or prestige you had, or what kind of life you had lived. It was unbiased, and it came suddenly, often without any sense of fairness or justness. Death had claimed her parents unexpectedly one day, without any warning, in a brutally insignificant accident that some would argue wasn't a fitting end for a king and a queen, and it wouldn't care who Vaati had been when it one day came to claim him as well.

No. No no no no no! He's not DEAD!

There had to be something she could do. Something to make this all right again. After everything she and Vaati had gone through, she couldn't just sit here and accept that he was dead. She glared at the fairy, sending it away for suggesting that her best friend couldn't be saved. She'd seen him alive just a few minutes ago, he couldn't have died so quickly in such anâ€| an insignificant way.

It would take the power of the goddesses themselves to bring someone back from the dead

Zelda blinked when she remembered the last thing the fairy had said before she'd sent it away. Slowly, she looked down at her satin gloved hands when realization dawned on her that there was still an option left to save Vaati. She wavered for a few seconds as she wondered if she should really do this, and then, finally, she bit her lip and ripped her right glove off of her hands.

The room basked in a warm yellow glow as the gold symbol of the Triforce glittered on the top of her hand. Zelda hesitated again when she remembered a conversation she'd had with Impa when she'd been a young girl of about seven years old. She remembered Impa, much younger than she was now but with the same expression of dependability, and she remembered her holding her hand as her guardian tried to console her.

"_I know you miss your parents, your grace._"

"_I hate them, Impa. Sometimes I really hate them. They left me with a kingdom I don't even want. I never asked for this._"

"_You aren't without a guide. I'll always be here for you, princess, and if you ever feel lost then let your mother's last gift guide you as well._"

"_I never asked for this STUPID triangle, either. I justâ€| I just want my parents back._"

Zelda took a deep breath, and slowly, cautiously placed her right hand over Vaati.

"_The Triforce will guide you to light in times when darkness threatens to overwhelm you. It is said that it can even call forth miracles in times of great need._"

"_Miraclesâ€|?_"

"_Yes. However, there is one thing you must never, ever wish for, your grace._"

There was a bright flash of light, and the gold triangle on Zelda's hand began to glow brighter. She felt a tingle run down her hand, and a sensation of something pulling her in and out of consciousness as the triangle shook and broke in two.

"_You must never wish for the dead to live, for to do that is to tamper with the will of the goddesses._"

Light sparkled against a tear that rolled down her face.

"I'm sorry, Impa," Zelda whispered. There was a cough, and the Minish-turned Vaati began to breathe again, a gold triangle of the Triforce identical to Zelda's on his right paw.

* * *

><p>fleets: Not much to say. I hope the chapter speaks for itself?<p>

**Ai Star: **Haha we'll see about grudges. Annnd the feels train starts now. :3

**Vesperupus: **Zelda's 20th birthday is probably the worst birthday ever. It's been a while since I tackled Vaati's backstory, and I plan on addressing things I never got to before, so I'm pretty excited :)

>Feels train departing now. It's only going to get worse from here :D<p>

**Annoying Person: **Oof, what a guest name D: (you're not annoying, guest!)

>Ahhh I'm happy you liked my stories! Rewriting TU has crossed my mind a few times, though I haven't seriously considered it. People seemed to enjoy that story, people seemed to enjoy Rend, and I enjoyed writing both Rend and TU. Maybe once I'm burnt out of all other fanfic ideas and don't feel like doing my original story I might consider it? Not sure though.

**plum: **I see Impa as kind of like the adoptive mom of both Zelda and Vaati haha. Boy she's got her hands full.

>I want to slow down because I know my writing quality might suffer for it but I can't... I can't stop D:
I guess I should be thankful while I still have inspiration/motivation (I just want something in between though haha not something so manic)

>Thanks plum! I really appreciate your support :)<p>

**Serpent Tailed Angel: **Considering he was just declared dead... probably can't get much worse. Unless I bring him back to life and kill him all over again, I guess that could be worse.

>We'll see who is ;)<p>

**Peregrine777: **The mystery man... he's pretty powerful! And ahhh I try to make my curveballs extra curvy so that makes me happy to hear! I do have a few in store this time, so I hope I can take people by surprise :)

**AquilaMage: **Impa's the mom neither Zelda nor Vaati ever had ;u;

>I'm pretty excited to get to that part, especially since I have a surprise planned that I don't think people are going to expect ;)<p>

4. Soulbound

fleets: i've been getting so much wonderful fanart lately (on tumblr, under 'art for fleets' tag) that i can't help but be inspired. And when I'm inspired, I guess I write faster. Maybe a little too fast haha

Also Hyrule Warriors has been a great source of inspiration. The downside is that I usually end up wanting to play and write at the same time, which is impossible.

* * *

><p>Chapter 4: Soulbound

"How are you feeling?"

Vaati awoke to the sound of Zelda's voice, his eyes opening slowly as he took in a long breath. The crushing feeling in his chest had lifted, and he felt so good that he wouldn't have believed that he'd been fighting for his life earlier if it weren't for the fact that he was still a Minish.

Oh how he'd hoped to never see the world from this vantage ever again. He remembered how he must look to her now, and he sat up from the floor with his back turned away. His look of relief that Zelda was still all right was replaced with disgust and self-loathing, and he fell into a sullen silence.

"Vaati, that's you, right?" Zelda asked, concerned that he was still unwell. She tried not to appear too curious about his new appearance, because she was sure that he wouldn't appreciate being stared at like an exotic animal. He was undoubtedly upset - who wouldn't be? - and yet she couldn't help but think how cute he was with his big eyes and chubby cheeks, and that fluffy tail wrapped around himself so that he was curled into a ball. The last thing proud Vaati would want to hear right now was that he was adorable, so she bit her lip and made a mental note of it instead.

The Minish barely lifted his chin, his back still turned towards the princess. After some time, he gave a heavy sigh, looking at his paws shamefully. "Yeahâ€œ it's me," he said, wincing at the sound of his new voice. His vocal chords were different compared to his Hylian form, and now it was a bit higher in pitch. Squeaky, even. He resisted the urge to rip the fur off his face.

Zelda's shoulders visibly relaxed when she finally received verbal confirmation that the strange, mouse-like creature was, in fact, Vaati. "What happened?" she asked, and then added hesitantly, "And why do youâ€œ why do you look like that?"

At this, Vaati turned his head towards Zelda so that she could see his new beady red eyes. He regarded her for a few seconds, trying to figure out if she was truly ignorant of the story of the Wind Mage and who he'd once been. Judging from her reaction, it was likely that she didn't even know what a Minish was. They had disappeared into obscurity over the centuries after all: perhaps no one even knew about them anymore.

He was somewhat confused as to why the princess was able to see him at all, considering how the Minish could only be seen by children. The Minish had inherent magic that made them invisible adults, so she should not have been able to see him. Still, it was fortunate that she could still see him even if it pained him that he would be seen in such a pathetic state. Otherwise, he'd have a lot more trouble dealing with the man who'd done this to him.

"I followed a man who was going to hurt you," Vaati said slowly, a little more comfortable now that he suspected that Zelda had no clue about the Minish or his embarrassing origins. His brows furrowed as he tried to recount everything that had happened earlier in the night. He remembered the tall man who'd fought like a Sheikah. Black cloak. A flash of blue, a symbol like an eye. An ancient mask of stone with a single carved eye. "I thought he would be easy to take care of but he had this mask andâ€|"

Vaati trailed off. He remembered the overwhelming power of the mask, nothing like he'd encountered before, except perhaps the raw power of Zelda's own Triforce. However, unlike the holy power of Zelda's magic, this one had beenâ€| well, 'dark' was the only way he could describe it. Its aura had been repelling, like a silent scream in blinding darkness. He remembered all of his power getting sucked out, almost controlled by the mask until he'd been reduced to his repulsive, original form.

He remembered falling to pieces. Dying.

Confused, Vaati looked down at his body, patting himself down as though to make sure he was real. He felt much too alive for someone who'd been dying earlier. In addition, there was also another feeling that made him uneasy that he couldn't quite put a finger on yet. It was almost like he was reading someone's mind? No, no that wasn't it. It was more like someone else's thoughts, or rather emotions, were mangled with his own. There was no reason why he should feel like he was holding back tears (one, that was extremely uncharacteristic of him and two, there was nothing he should be feeling sad about) and yet he could feel the faint tug of heartache. It was very faint, but noticeable enough that it disturbed him.

"Why is it that I feel a lot more alive than I should?" Vaati asked. Then, he noticed the glowing triangle on the back of his right paw and blanched. Now he was certain that he'd died and gone to some weird, trippy afterlife. Or maybe he was drugged up on mushroom brew. Really strong mushroom brew. This night had been crazy enough that he was willing to consider the fact that none of this was real.

He groaned inwardly. He hoped to Din that Dethl hadn't actually returned and was now making him see weird dreams in revenge.

The mark of the Triforce was glowing faintly on the back of his hand. The Triforce. The Triforce. The object he'd been after sinceâ€| since the time he'd first heard of its existence. It was what had inspired Ezlo (to think he'd be reminded of that name again) to create something similar in power, in the form of the Wishing Cap. "Zelda, what is this?" he asked hoarsely, not really caring about how his question had been extra squeaky.

Zelda looked down at her hands, rubbing her mark slowly. Vaati couldn't help but notice that she had a melancholic smile, which didn't make much sense to him considering how both of them were still alive.

Why was she sad? And why was he feeling sad, too?

"I shared my Triforce with you," the princess answered, and she held out her hand to show him the identical gold mark on hers.

"You can do that?" Vaati asked, skepticism creeping into his voice. His new feathery tail swished, mirroring his feelings. "I've done my research on the Triforce and I never heard of--"

"Consider it a family secret. It's a good thing you have friends in high places," Zelda interrupted him teasingly, with a bright smile on her face. However, it did nothing to assuage Vaati's suspicions that something about this shared Triforce situation was very wrong. He recognized Zelda's smile as the mask she used when deflecting uncomfortable questions or conversations she didn't want to continue. She was very good at fooling others with this smile, but Vaati knew her too well.

Still frowning, he opened his mouth to say something, but then stopped when he saw a look of fear pass briefly over her smile. Startled, he lost his voice, and then decided not to pursue his line of questioning when he saw her eyes pleading with him to trust her and let it go. This didn't make him feel any better, and he had a gnawing suspicion that this 'family secret' of Triforce sharing wasn't something natural and perhaps even taboo, but he decided to let it slide. For now. They had more pressing issues to worry about and he could interrogate her about what she had done later.

Vaati shook his head, and then stretched his limbs. His new feet still felt funny and awkward after being so used to Hylian anatomy for so long. "We have to tell Impa. That man is still out there and if--"

"No!" Zelda interrupted him yet again, her voice raised and almost frantic. She surprised even herself, and she brought her hand up to her lips. It wasn't really like her to lose her composure like that. She started again under Vaati's scrutinizing gaze. "No," she said, her voice returning to its usual calm and collected tone, "If we tell her what happened she will cancel the ball."

At this, Vaati's tail fluffed up and creases appeared on his forehead. "I think the ball is the least of our worries right now."

"If his target tonight was me, then there's a chance that he will return to finish the job."

Vaati's eyes widened when he realized what Zelda was getting at. She wanted to be bait? "No. No, absolutely not," he snapped. This was absurd. The right thing to do in this situation was to let Impa know about the danger so that all three of them could deal with it together. This man was very dangerous, especially considering he'd been able to^{â€œ} to overpower him and undo the magic of the Wishing Cap. What Zelda was suggesting was almost like^{â€œ}

_It's almost like something __**I**__ would do,_ Vaati thought.

Impulsive. Reckless. That wasn't really her style.

And why was he suddenly the overly cautious one?

There was a knock on the door, and the two of them looked up at the sound of Impa's worried shout from behind the door. "Princess Zelda? Is everything all right?"

"Yes, I'll be there in a minute!" Zelda answered. Then, she held out a hand, beckoning Vaati to hop on top of it. Her blue eyes were stern as she said sharply under her breath, "Do not let Impa know about what happened just yet, and make sure no one sees you." She added, "Please let me do this. For me. This may be our only chance to catch the person who did this to you."

Impulsive, reckless, and impatient, too, Vaati noted. He'd seen Zelda, especially as Sheik, in even the most stressful situations and yet the Sheikah had always been able to handle things in a methodical, level-headed manner. Zelda wasn't acting like herself right now; she was letting her emotions take over.

Vaati gritted his teeth, not liking the idea at all. He stepped on top of her hand cautiously, and then he had to find his balance when Zelda stood up abruptly and rushed over to her dresser to find a white, fur shawl. Eventually, he said with a scowl, "Fine. But I'm coming with you."

Zelda put her arms through the shawl's sleeves, and she fluffed up its fur with her free hand. Then, she brought Vaati up to her shoulder where he could hide between the outfit's fur and her hair. "Of course you're coming with me," she agreed, "You're going to help me identify and find this man." She spent a few seconds righting some of the furniture that hadn't been broken to pieces during Vaati's fight, before she ran towards the door where Impa was waiting. Once Vaati was snuggled and hidden on her shoulder, she took a deep breath and opened the door.

Zelda slammed it shut behind her before Impa could get a good look at the damage inside. "There was a draft and I was feeling a little cold," Zelda explained with a smile, waving away Impa's worried expression and pointing at the fur shawl she was wearing.

Impa's eyes glanced between the door and the princess, and her lips flattened for a moment as though she wasn't buying her story. However, she trusted that Zelda would let her know if there was anything seriously wrong, so she didn't press her. Instead, she shook her head with a sigh. "Have you seen Vaati recently?"

"No," Zelda replied, and she casually ran her fingers along her hair so that it would fall over the hidden wind mage. She also made sure to give a light pat on the fur of her shawl where the Minish was, since he'd apparently lost balance and was wiggling in a way that was tickling her neck. She coughed lightly to cover up an angry squeak. "Why do you ask?"

"I need to alert him to the fact that there may be a suspicious character wandering about."

At this, Vaati's ears twitched. Oh believe you me I know, he thought bitterly, and then suppressed the urge to sneeze from all the strands of hair and fur that was getting in his face.

Impa continued, unaware that the sorcerer in question was hidden atop Zelda's shoulders. "I cannot find him anywhere and I doubt that he's suddenly become good at hiding his tracks."

I do not care about hiding! I am the most powerful sorcerer in the

world, such an individual has no need to hide,_ Vaati scowled, offended that his skills were being criticized. He held his nose when he finally sneezed, which earned him another warning tap on the head from Zelda.

"Where was this individual? Did you confront them?" Zelda asked.

At this, Impa shook her head. "Do not concern yourself too much over this, princess, though I do ask that you be careful and to not wander off on your own. I'm not completely sure if what I saw was a person or a trick of the light."

Zelda, however, was convinced that Impa had indeed seen a person sneaking about. "Where did you see them?"

"In the courtyard, about half an hour ago," Impa said reluctantly, and she returned a tired gaze at the princess who looked just about ready to go investigate on her own. She frowned disapprovingly, letting Zelda know that she did not like the idea of her going off to try and find this possible intruder.

Meanwhile, Vaati's mind was racing as he thought about what Impa had just said. But that was when I was following the suspicious man to Zelda's room, Vaati thought, going over where he'd seen the masked man half an hour ago. They hadn't been close to the courtyard at that time, so unless the man had a way to be in two places at once, the person Impa had seen could not have been him.

He's not working alone, then.

That shouldn't have been much of a surprise. Whatever the masked man had been after, Vaati doubted that it was for something simple like a petty theft. No, it was more than likely that he wasn't working alone.

"I promise to be careful, and I'll be sure to let Vaati know if I find him," Vaati heard Zelda assure Impa, before she began to walk down the stairs towards the banquet hall. He snuck a peek over her shoulder to make sure Impa was out of earshot before he gave a light tug on one of Zelda's strands of hair.

"Zelda," he hissed, "The man we're after; he as an accomplice."

The princess made no indication that she'd heard him, and instead nodded to some of the servants she passed in the halls. She laughed lightly, covering her mouth with a gloved hand when they complimented her on her looks, and made her way to the doors that led back to the party.

She pressed a hand on the door, and the fake warmth in her eyes vanished for a brief second when they were replaced with cold determination.

"More for us to catch, then," she whispered, and opened the doors to step back into the crowd of people who were blissfully unaware of the princess on a hunt.

XXXXXXXXXXXX

Vaati usually enjoyed parties, balls, banquets, what have you. He

liked throwing himself in the middle of a social gathering and winning the gaze of everyone there, especially since he had a knack for stealing people's attention. However, now that he could do nothing but watch from his perch on Zelda's shoulder, he found the party to be tiresome and irritating, and the more the night went on the more he wished Zelda would have just canceled the damned thing.

Right now it was about an hour in since the two of them had returned to the banquet hall in order to bait out the masked man or his accomplices, but he'd caught no sign of anyone suspicious.

Instead, he'd had the pleasure to watch over a dozen pitiful nobles, a vast majority of them men, who attempted to steal Zelda away for some of her time. He bit his cheek and did his best not to cause a scene, but it was getting increasingly difficult not to jump out and bite the fingers off the next hand that tried to get touchy. He was becoming so distracted by these attention seekers that he was having a hard time staying focused on their main objective of trying to find the masked man. The nobles were getting on his nerves.

Like this guy, who was trying to start a conversation with Zelda right now. He was a young man, unremarkable in all of his features. Vaati labeled him as ugly, as he'd done for all the others who'd tried to talk to the princess earlier. His temper flared when he thought about how Zelda was probably going to smile and talk to the guy anyway, since she was too friendly and welcoming for her own good. He was not looking forward to having to spend more precious minutes of his life listening to her conversation with this bright-eyed fool.

"Excuse me, I'm not in the mood for conversation."

At this, Vaati looked up in surprise, wondering if he'd really heard Zelda decline or if he'd picked up someone else's voice. His eyes widened even more when he saw a visible scowl on Zelda's face, which was unusual since she normally kept up that fake, polite smile when she was out in public.

Well this might be interesting, Vaati thought, a devious grin tugging at his lips. He couldn't help but remember all the times Sheik had jokingly confided the things he wished he could say to people who annoyed him when he was Zelda. To be honest, after seeing Zelda navigate Hyrulian politics, he thought that the Gerudo Witches had made a good point when they'd claimed that the Hylians should be more straightforward with what they meant.

Zelda blinked, and she, too, appeared surprised by her own tone. The young man who'd come up to her looked shocked from the blunt rejection, and the princess hastily apologized, not because she was wrong to turn him down, but because she was startled that she'd broken her own social mask. "I mean, I am feeling a little tired and would prefer solitude," she corrected herself hastily.

Vaati groaned. Just when he thought he could see a good show, Zelda was going to bring this conversation back to the "yes please, thank you, how is your uncle doing?" of boring, 'acceptable' social chatter. With a sigh, he buried his face into the fur shawl in aggravation when the young man brightened again.

"The crowd does get tiresome, doesn't it?" he said as he offered her a drink.

He's going to offer to take her away, isn't he, Vaati rolled his eyes.

"Would you allow me to take you somewhere quieter? You look unwell, and the noise of the people here would only make it worse."

See? I knew it. And then she's going to decline 'nicely' so she wouldn't hurt his feelings, but she doesn't realize that it's only going to get him to try harder. He glared when the young man came closer, close enough that Vaati could jump from Zelda's shoulder to his. Then he noticed that the man already had his hand on her waist._ Why am I even here right now?_

Without warning, Vaati felt his foothold become unsteady and he had to hurriedly cling to the fur of the shawl so that he wouldn't be thrown off of Zelda's shoulder. He heard a thud and a yelp, and the sound of breaking glass. When he peeked out from his perch, he suppressed a cackle when he saw the young man on the ground with shattered glass and spilled drink around him. The man appeared confused by what had happened, and Vaati couldn't blame him; Zelda was extremely fast with her disarms and suppression moves.

Before anyone could say anything, Zelda strode off, out of the banquet hall and outside the main gate for some fresh air. She looked bewildered, her lips torn between a grin and a frown like she was both pleased and horrified by what she'd just done.

On one hand, she'd had enough with people getting overly friendly with her without her consent and had been wanting to do that for a long time. On the other hand, the entire purpose of holding a birthday ball was so she could gain the favors of a few powerful nobles to help with relief efforts, and what she'd done was counterproductive.

What surprised her the most was that she was usually good at keeping her feelings hidden and in check, and she was good at playing the social game. It wasn't like that was the first person who'd gotten grabby with her before, and yet this time, she couldn't fight the impulse of just knocking that man over and pouring his drink over his face. She'd also been angry. Unusually angry.

"Can I give you my opinion?"

Zelda heard Vaati's voice from her shoulder, and from the way it was strained she could tell that he was holding back a snicker.

"You should do that more often."

She looked towards her shoulder and sure enough, she could see the mousey Vaati peering at her with a shit eating grin on his face. Zelda couldn't help but smile with an exasperated shake of her head, and she flicked a finger at his tiny nose.

Vaati was about to protest, his nose wiggle after getting flicked, but instead froze when he noticed something. His tail bristled and a chill ran down his spine when he sensed a familiar aura, and he urgently tapped Zelda's shoulder. "Magic. To your left, that way," he

said sharply.

Zelda's smile vanished instantly, and her muscles tensed. "How do you know?" she asked. As a magic adept herself, she should be able to faintly sense powerful magic, too, but she couldn't pick up anything.

Vaati was about to explain how the Minish were more sensitive than other races to magic, but he bit his tongue. She didn't need to know about the Minish just yet, or ever, for that matter. "I just do," he replied instead.

Zelda nodded, knowing when to not press an issue further. A hidden dagger appeared in her right hand, and she made her way towards the direction that Vaati was pointing at. The breeze picked up the conversation from within the castle, but other than that the night was deathly quiet. The wind pulled gently at the hem of her dress, and Zelda wished that she could handle this in Sheik's uniform instead. Transforming now was out of the question, however, because while there weren't many people wandering around outside, there were one too many to take the risk of someone seeing her.

The two of them didn't encounter anyone suspicious until Zelda was about to round the corner of the castle. Just as she stepped out of the corner, her peripheral vision caught someone running at her frantically. Zelda tried to get out of their way, but the person had been going so fast that they ended up slamming their shoulder against her, knocking them both onto the ground. She'd been about to ask them if they were okay until she heard Vaati shouting, "Him, it's him!"

At the same time that Vaati was shouting, she heard a different voice yelling at her. It was Impa, and she saw her guardian running at them with her huge greatsword drawn. "Stop that man!"

Zelda whirled around towards the person who'd crashed into her, but they had already gotten back onto their feet and was trying to make a run for it. She gripped the dagger that she had in her hand tightly, and then aimed for the back of his knees to cripple him. It would have hit, except the person had chosen at that moment to turn back to take a look at his pursuers and noticed the dagger flying towards him. He swung himself around, and rather than hitting him behind the knees, the dagger hit the man's shins that were protected by armor.

Though the blade was deflected by the shin guards, the man lost his balance and fell on the ground backwards. Zelda and Impa caught up to him before he could get back up.

"No, that's not the masked man," Zelda heard Vaati whisper.

His accomplice, then.

The accomplice was a young man whose face was covered by a black cowl, and a mask that covered everything below his eyes. If Zelda didn't know any better, she would have thought that this person had an uncanny resemblance to Sheik, except that the strands of hair that fell in front of his eyes were black with an almost purple shine, and his clothes almost looked like a black and purple version of Sheik's uniform.

Something about that description reminded her about a conversation she'd had with Ravio and Shadow Link. They, too, had met someone who reminded them of a Sheikah when they had gone to fight Dethl in the Dark World, exceptâ€¦

He looked a lot like a Sheikah. Except, you know, with different colors. More blacks and purples than your whites and blues.

Zelda's eyes narrowed, and her blue eyes met his red ones. Was it possible that this was someone who'd come from the Dark World? But how could that be?

Zelda watched his eyes widen in surprise at seeing her. She couldn't shake the feeling that the accomplice was staring at her in fascination.

Zelda grabbed two more daggers that she'd kept strapped, hidden on her leg, and she pointed one at the young man on the ground. "I urge you to come with us peacefully," she ordered.

The man said nothing. However, she could tell from the way his catlike eyes squinted that he was smirking behind his mask.

_Why can they never turn themselves in quietly? _she thought, and she crouched, ready to react on a moment's notice.

"Zelda, be careful. If he's anything like the masked man then he's going to be trouble," Vaati urged.

Zelda nodded and she glanced at Impa who had caught up and was next to her with her greatsword. At least this time, they had him outnumbered two to one. She hoped that was going to be enough.

* * *

><p>fleets: a lot happened this chapter! A lot of unexplained stuff that I'm sure a lot of you have figured out already ;) (like hey hey why is Zelda being Vaati-ish?)
Some other questions for future thought: why is Minish Vaati visible to adults? who's the masked man and what's that mask? what's so bad about sharing Triforces? The Sheik lookalike is Tenzi, isn't it (for you tumblr folk)?
>(lol make sure i get to answering these questions in the actual story, up and coming, because while i don't think i will forget, it's likely i might since. i'm a forgetful person and all. haha whoops)<p>

**plum: **Just imagine how angry Vaati's going to be when he finds out (whistles). Ahhhh thank you I still haven't really learned to pace as you can see (3 days between updates omfg what am i doing)

**AquilaMage: **Hahaha yeahhh leave it to Vaati to screw up. Again. But now that Zelda's gotten a little Vaati-like impulsiveness he won't be alone anymore in his screw ups! ... yay?

>These two are adorable together but they'll pull their own teeth out before they admit it :P
Yeahhhh he's uh... well Zelda knows he won't be happy about it. Too bad she's making that same mistake from demonbound about keeping secrets :O

**Reilly96: **haha i haven't even said who they are yet! xD
>I wouldn't say the last chapter was a cry chapter. Actually I think this story is more like an "ouch my heart" story rather than a waterfall weeping story. Then again, I've been horribly wrong about this in the past and I may have become numb after going over the plot of this story over and over again. I can safely say that this story is only going to get worse in the heartache sense, though :D
>man. Your comment. hahahaah
>Abridged Chapter 3:
Vaati: dies
>Zelda: oh fuck no im no necrophiliac im not kissing a dead guy (revives Vaati)<p>

**Serpent Tailed Angel: **he's learned a little from being with Sheik and Impa. Unfortunately probably not enough :P

**CatrinSara: **Ahhh thank you! I'm happy you liked it! :D

**Ai Star: **You guessed it! It's where the title gets its name, too :)

5. Burden of Secret

fleets: ummm, not sure what to say here. I hope you like this chapter!

* * *

><p>Chapter 5: Burden of Secret

Zelda and Impa had the accomplice cornered, but she didn't like how unconcerned he looked, like he knew he could get away if he wanted to. The princess's palms glowed with the white light of magic, ready to attack if he tried something. She kept a careful eye on him while Impa approached from the side with a coil of chains in her hand.

The accomplice's eyes darted between the princess and her guardian as they approached, and he hopped back onto his feet lightly, watching them from a low crouch. For several tense seconds, they watched each other in strained silence while the merry laughter and music from the castle drifted by, unaware of the conflict going on outside. Then, to Zelda's surprise, the accomplice raised both hands over his head slowly.

"I see I am outmatched. I will come quietly, like you asked," he said.

Zelda could practically hear his smirk from behind his black mask, and the magic in her palms flared a little when she tensed even more. Something about this was too easy; he had to be planning something. After what Vaati had said about the first one, these people, whoever they were, sounded like they would be able to overpower her and Impa if they wanted to. She stole an uneasy glance towards Impa, who also didn't seem to be convinced that the intruder was being truthful.

The man straightened up from his crouch, his hands still in the air. He noted Zelda and Impa's mistrusting gazes. "I'd like to think that we are not enemies," he explained, nodding to the princess.

Zelda heard Vaati snort, and she shared the sorcerer's sentiments. "Is that so?" she asked curtly.

The man held out his taped hands towards Impa, allowing her to tie them together. He winced just a little when she gave them an extra pull to tie them tighter, and Zelda couldn't help but be relieved that, at the very least, the man was human enough to feel discomfort.

Zelda waited for an explanation on why this young man claimed that they were not enemies, even though he was undoubtedly someone who was working with the other man who had attacked and almost succeeded in killing Vaati. Well, actually succeeded in killing Vaati. Now that she thought back on his words, however, he hadn't actually said that they weren't enemies; just that he liked to think that they weren't.

Normally she wouldn't have paid attention to such detail in conversation, but this person reminded her of Sheikah, and Sheikah often took advantage of subtle sentence arrangements that played on people's assumptions for truth. That, and he didn't exactly present himself as the trustworthy type.

She waited a few seconds, but still the young man seemed like he wasn't going to bother elaborating why they weren't enemies. Once again, she had that nagging thought that this person reminded her of the Sheikah. The Sheikah, at least really skilled ones, knew not to run their mouth, something that Vaati sorely struggled with. It could have just been a coincidence that this man was almost pointedly avoiding necessary conversation despite looking like he had much to say, but at the same timeâ€!

Maybe he did have something to do with the shadow tribe.

"Take him for interrogation," she said to Impa.

As soon as she said so, she felt like someone had gripped her throat, a sense of uneasy fear that she couldn't say was entirely her own. For reasons she couldn't explain, she suddenly had a feeling that the accomplice would be able to escape unless she knocked him out. She needed to attack him. Beat him. He wasn't safe.

"Zelda, are you all right?"

Zelda's ears perked at the sound of Impa's voice, but she kept her gaze on their prisoner who was watching her coolly with his calculating red eyes. Whenever Impa used her name to address her, she knew that something was seriously wrong, but she couldn't turn her head away from the man. She knew that she probably looked unwell right now, but she couldn't bring herself to calm down.

Then, she noticed that the man wasn't looking at her, but something on her shoulder.

He was looking at Vaati. She could see the man's brows raise slightly upon seeing the Minish, and then she saw them furrow, his hooded gaze becoming something like a glare. It didn't escape her notice that his fingers twitched like he was ready to pounce, to snatch Vaati from her shoulder and take him away.

And Vaati's expression, too, unnerved her. His hair was standing on its ends, his tail fluffed up like a panicked squirrel's.

Attack him first. Attack him ****first**** before he attacks you!

Instinct overtook her usual, level headed judgment. Her right hand shot forward, magic flaring like a spear of light towards the young man. In the background, she could hear Impa yelling at her to stop, but her voice was drowned out by her heartbeat pounding in her ears.

Time seemed to slow as the attack charged towards the accomplice like a dragon of lightning. She saw those intense red eyes look up at her and narrow slightly, before they vanished completely. The chains that had been tied around the man's wrists fell loosely onto the grass when the prisoner disappeared without a trace, and Zelda's frantic attack continued forward through empty air until it hit the wall some distance away, leaving a soot-stained mark on the stone.

"Whereâ€|" Zelda looked around, trying to figure out where the prisoner had gone. There was no way he could have vanished like that, not with his hands tied. He shouldn't have been able to cast any sort of evasive spell in his situation.

Unless, however, if he'd been like Shadow Link, and could move in and out of shadows at will.

"Damn it!" Zelda shouted, and began to run towards the path that led to the gates leading out of Hyrule. She didn't take more than three steps, however, when a firm grip around her wrist stopped her. She whirled around, a snarl flashing on her face before she came face to face with Impa's stern expression. Zelda's face fell when she finally realized how she was behaving. "Impa Iâ€|" she began, shrinking away from her guardian's intimidating gaze.

"Forgive my tone, princess, but what's going on?" Impa asked, her voice sharp and intimidating.

"I'm just feeling a little stressed and-"

"What's that thing on your shoulder?"

Zelda froze midsentence, and she was almost afraid to look where Impa was pointing. She slowly dared to glance towards her shoulder, and she knew what she was going to see. As expected, Vaati was sitting on her shoulder, not even bothering to hide, and he had his tiny arms crossed over his chest as he pointed his chin towards Impa. Zelda's voice rose in frustration, and almost like a mirror, Vaati, too, shot a look at her that suggested that he was upset as well. "I told you to stay hidden!" she snapped.

"We just lost our opportunity to capture either the masked man or his accomplice, so I see no reason why I have to remain hidden from Impa," Vaati retorted, refusing to back down. "She needs to know what happened."

"Are you blaming me for letting him go, is that it Vaati?"

"No! You're not acting like yourself, Zelda, and we all see that!"

Something's clearly wrong and-"

"_Nothing is wrong with me!_"

"Enough!" Impa stepped forward, plucked Vaati off of Zelda's shoulder and placed him on the palm of her hand. The Minish frowned a little, bearing his teeth at her for a moment before taking a deep breath and turning to Zelda. The princess, meanwhile, clutched her head in her hands as though cradling a growing headache, and she appeared more ashamed by her behavior now, than angry at Vaati.

Impa's gaze flickered between Zelda and the tiny creature in her hand, and her brows furrowed further in concern when she began to piece together what was going on. While she was surprised by the fact that Zelda had called this creature 'Vaati,' she was more surprised by the princess's strange behavior. It was almost like she'd become a different person, someone who was more prone to acting out on impulses, swayed by emotions, and someone who could not control their anger. In fact, seeing her argue with the mouse-like thing in her hand, it almost looked like she was acting like Vaati himself.

The corner of Impa's lips curled into a frown, and her free hand curled into a fist when a terrible thought occurred to her. She closed her eyes and breathed slowly, and then opened her eyes again to look at the creature in her hand. He was about as tall as her thumb, and looked like a mouse wearing purple robes. Still, there was no doubt in her mind that those keen red eyes were those of someone she knew. "Vaati," she said, and paused to watch the creature nod in affirmation. "Show me your hands."

At this, Zelda looked up sharply. "No, wait!" she cried, reaching out towards them. As she did so, the gold mark of her Triforce glowed softly on her right hand, alongside Vaati's glowing on his paw. Zelda shrunk back, afraid, when Impa raised her head towards her with her eyes wide.

"I-Impa, I canâ€œ| I can explain," Zelda stammered, holding her marked hand close to her chest. She backed away slowly, unable to bear the way Impa was looking at her.

Impa, the one who comforted her when she was afraid, the one who had always been her pillar of support, actually looked fearful.

Zelda reflexively shut her eyes tightly when Impa began walking towards her, and she waited for angry yelling. She knew Impa had every right to be angry at her, angry enough, perhaps, to even leave her service and disappear into the far reaches of Hyrule where the last of the Sheikah were said to still walk. After all, the princess had abused the power of her Triforce in a way she never should have done.

Instead of punishment, however, Zelda felt herself being pulled into an embrace, reminding her of the times back when she was a small girl who was struggling with her parents' passing. Zelda opened her eyes in surprise as Impa hugged her tightly, shushing away the apology that had been about to spill from her lips.

"My poor dears," Impa whispered, "everything's going to be okay."

Zelda's arms dropped to her sides at Impa's words, allowing herself to be embraced. She nodded slowly into her guardian's shoulders, and the corners of her mouth tugged into a melancholic smile. Zelda rarely cried ever since her parents died, but a tear threatened to roll down her cheeks as she was overwhelmed with emotion.

Despite what Impa said, everything wasn't okay. She wasn't sure if they were ever going to be okay, because she and Impa both knew that what she had done might not have a solution. She clung to her guardian's words anyway, because in truth she was afraid, and she welcomed any gesture that could give her hope that things were going to turn out fine.

The fact was that saving someone from the dead was a grave offense, an unacceptable infraction in the laws of nature. People readily assumed that magic could solve any problem, but this was not the case. While magic, mostly dark magic, existed that could allow one to snatch a dead soul back to the world of the living, all of them involved terrible consequences. More often than not, the consequences involved trading in a life for a life, and using the power of the Triforce to save someone was of no exception. There was a reason why necromancy was regarded with utmost disgust.

Using her holy privilege for something that was technically necromancy was probably worse than what dark magic practitioners did. What she did was sacrilegious, too, wasn't it?

Using half of her Triforce's power to allow Vaati to live was but a temporary solution. Eventually, the Triforce would try to become whole again and one of them would have to pay their dues.

Eventually, one of them would have to die.

Zelda felt strong hands grip her shoulders firmly, and she raised her eyes to Impa, who had her knees bent so that she could see the princess's lowered gaze.

"I'm going to tell everyone at the ball that you are feeling unwell, and then I'm sending them home," Impa explained softly, concern on her face.

Zelda nodded, looking up briefly but lowering her eyes again when she couldn't bear to see Vaati watching her with a mix of both concern and suspicion from atop Impa's shoulders. She couldn't let Vaati know the truth about what she had done to save his life. Not yet. Hopefully not ever.

Impa sighed, a heavy weight on her chest. "Let me lead you up to your room. The three of us need to talk."

XXXXXXXXXXXX

Back in her room, Zelda picked up her scattered belongings and broken furniture while the sounds of the party quieted and the music stopped, no doubt from Impa letting her guests know that the celebration was over. She'd barely spoken a word to Vaati, who sat quietly atop her bed as he watched her put her room back together again. The silence was stifling, and the princess wished that the former sorcerer would say something, anything, rather than give her a

judgmental stare like he knew that she was hiding something from him.

It brought her back to the times when she'd lied to him about his true identity as the infamous sorcerer, back when she'd lied to him about being 'Fuu.' He'd looked at her the same way, then, and just like back then he didn't press her about what she was hiding from him. Instead, he looked at her in a way that suggested that he knew that she wasn't telling him everything, but was waiting for her to break the ice first.

Still, there was no way she could tell him. She was willing to suffer through these pointed stares if it meant that she could spare him the cruelty of knowing the cost of keeping him alive.

Zelda looked up in visible relief when she heard a knock on the door and Impa's voice asking to enter. Cleaning her room was only doing so much to keep her distracted from Vaati's gaze. "Come in," she said.

Impa walked in, shutting the door behind her quietly, and immediately walked over to the chair by the window. She sat down, hanging her head like she was suddenly overcome with fatigue. The creases along her eyes appeared darker, and she looked more aged than Zelda had ever seen her. Impa briefly scanned the aftermath of the fight that had occurred in Zelda's room, and the Sheikah shook her head to herself. Normally, she probably would have scolded Zelda for not telling her about the attack earlier, since she now knew why Zelda had been acting so strangely when Impa had approached her here a few hours ago. However, Impa's mind was full of troubled thoughts and she no longer had any energy for anger.

"Tell me everything that has happened," Impa said, but her tone suggested that she really didn't want to know what had happened that caused Vaati to become a tiny mouse-creature, and had forced Zelda to use the one spell she should never use.

Zelda nodded, and then walked over to join Vaati on the bed; she figured she would need to be sitting to make it to the end of the conversation. She kept her distance from the Minish, like she was still nervous about his silent brooding, and then began to recount what had happened, with occasional pauses to let Vaati fill in the gaps to the story.

She tensed a little when they got to the part where she saved Vaati. While she insisted that she'd found him unconscious, she anticipated Impa to ask her why she couldn't just get a fairy to help her if Vaati had simply been out cold. However, Impa said nothing, only listening quietly with a thoughtful look on her face. Zelda relaxed a little, knowing from Impa's expression alone that the Sheikah guardian was willing to keep the deal with the Triforce sharing a secret from the wind mage, but she expected that the two of them would have a lengthy conversation about this later.

Even so, judging from the way Vaati was watching her with those calculating and perceptive eyes of his, Zelda knew that it was going to be difficult to keep the details of his recovery a secret for long. Her gut twisted at the thought of telling him the truth; still, tonight was not the night that he would find out about what happened. Too much had happenedâ€| it was completely selfish of her, but she

wouldn't be able to handle telling him tonight.

Vaati recounted the rest of what happened when Zelda trailed off, suddenly distressed with guilt and unable to continue. His previously stern, suspicion-filled gaze softened a little out of concern, and then he gave a small, aggravated sigh before turning to Impa to continue the narrative. Like Impa, he, too, didn't press her about what was wrong.

A flicker of gratitude warmed her heart when she thought about how lucky she was to have two people who understood her so well that they could pick up on her emotions without her having to say anything. Unfortunately, it was quickly replaced with even greater guilt for her behavior, and she rested her head in her hands tiredly.

Once Vaati was finished catching up to when they'd run into Impa, the older Sheikah sat for some time watching the two of them without a word. For a few seconds it looked like she was having trouble what to ask first; indeed, there were so many questions about what had happened. Finally, after some long deliberation and a heavy breath, she straightened up in her chair. Looking at the tired faces of both Vaati and the princess, Impa decided to impart information, rather than ask questions.

"I believe I know what kind of people we are dealing with," Impa said, and she was somewhat consoled when life returned to the other two's eyes, which had previously been darkened and cheerless.

"Other Sheikah," Vaati said.

"Interlopers," Zelda corrected.

Impa noted Vaati's confused expression as he looked towards the princess with a frown. "You are not entirely wrong, Vaati. However, the Sheikah, the real Sheikah, no longer associate ourselves with those that were banished to the Dark World many, many years before my time. We call them the Interlopers, and they do not deserve any other name," she explained patiently, though a slight terseness had crept into her voice as she tried not to be offended by the sorcerer's ignorant remark.

"Dark Wo-," Vaati started, crow's feet appearing on his forehead when he became increasingly confused. "You're saying these people came from the Dark World?" His nose wiggled and he threw his hands up in the air, "That's impossible. We destroyed the one thing that connects this world to theirs."

"Who's to say that another way hasn't opened?" Impa asked. "You saw the way the man escaped the chains around his wrists by melting into the shadows. You recognized how the man you fought with, and the second one we all encountered, moved like Sheikah. But what makes me believe that we are dealing with the Interlopers and not some rogue Sheikah imposters is because of the mask that your assailant wore."

At the mention of the mask, Vaati stiffened, and his tail flicked uneasily. "What is it?" he asked, his eyes squinting into a pained expression as he remembered his humiliating defeat against the power of the mask.

"Truthfully, I am unsure," Impa replied, and she held up a hand when the tiny rodent-like creature flashed her an insulted scowl.

"However, there is an old tale of the Fused Shadow, a powerful mask that the Interlopers sought to create, and perhaps succeeded in creating. Its power was so great that it had the ability to control the Triforce itself." A shadow passed over Impa's face, and she murmured, "Vaati, you were a sorcerer who was strong enough to force us to use our most powerful magic against you to keep you from overrunning Hyrule. It took the magic of our princess herself to even come close to stopping you. And yet, despite that, it took less than an hour for you to be completely stripped of your power against the masked man."

Vaati snorted and crossed his arms over his chest. "So perhaps I miscalculated and made a mistake," he spat unhappily.

Impa, however, shook her head. "I do not think it was simply a miscalculation. You describe the mask as legendary in power, similar to how powerful the Fused Shadow would be. As powerful as you. Perhaps even more."

Vaati fluffed up, clearly upset at the suggestion that he'd been outmatched by his opponent from the start. His teeth were bared for a moment and he looked ready to argue, but he eventually took a deep breath and curled back to sulk. Deep down he knew that what Impa had said was right; he still couldn't shake away the chills he got from thinking about his encounter with the masked man. He knew that she knew. It was pointless to argue.

"Well, since we're dealing with these banished Sheikah, then why don't we ask Hyrule's Sheikah for help, hmm?" Vaati asked, still bitter about having to admit his complete and utter defeat.

"Vaatiâ€œ|" Zelda warned, and she stole an uncomfortable glance towards Impa who's lips had flattened into a thin line.

"It's their problem just as much as ours," he snapped.

"_Vaati,_" Zelda repeated, more sternly this time, while Impa shot her a small smile telling her not to bother. Zelda frowned, and then exhaled slowly through her lips. They were all on edge right now, and the sorcerer couldn't have known that what he was saying was unfortunately offensive. She could feel the surface of anger and hurt burning in her chest, again at an intensity that was unusual for her, but this time she bit her tongue and forced herself to calm down. Though she wasn't completely certain about her theory, she was beginning to suspect that there were some unintended consequences about sharing the Triforce, one of which was heightened sensitivity to each other's emotions. "We cannot involve the Sheikah into our problems," she explained calmly, stressing 'our'.

For a split second, Vaati looked about to argue his point, but something seemed to click and he stopped himself. His weight, which had been on his toes earlier to make himself taller, dropped back so that he was sitting on his heels again. He blinked, not entirely sure why his anger had suddenly managed to calm itself down.

I don't believe it, Zelda thought, this is crazy, but the two of usâ€œ| are weâ€œ|? _

Well it certainly would explain why I was feeling exceptionally irritable earlier.

"Fine," Vaati grumbled instead. "But we still need to find that mask again so I can turn myself back into my real self." The Minish spread his arms exasperatedly, waving at himself and bringing attention to his new, rodent-like appearance.

Now that Zelda was attuned to how the two of them might be sharing emotions, she noticed the small flame of a feeling that she was sure was not her own. She wouldn't have been able to tell from Vaati's show of bravado, from the way he tossed his hand over his shoulder like it wasn't a big deal, but she could sense his fear beneath the beating of her own heart.

This fear, though, it wasn't just any fear. It wasn't the fear of someone who'd simply been turned into a small, admittedly adorable, creature. No, this fear came with an insecurity, that perhaps everything they'd ever had at this point was but a dream. It wasn't the fear of losing something that rightfully belonged to them. It was the fear of losing something they'd wrongfully gained.

Perhaps Vaati had noticed Zelda looking right through his act, because he suddenly froze, his breath caught in his throat and his waving hands dropped slowly to his sides. His red eyes twitched, and the insecurity that Zelda had felt surfaced on his face for a few fleeting seconds.

And then, she realized something peculiar about Vaati's situation: why in Hyrule had the masked man bothered to turn him into a small, mouse-like creature in the first place?

"Vaati," Zelda asked quietly, "Do you know why the masked man turned you into a mouse?"

"Why would I know?" Vaati snarled, lashing out with more anger than necessary.

"I believe it would be more accurate to say he was turned into a Minish."

They all turned towards Impa, who'd also been observing Zelda and Vaati's interactions with interest. Vaati bristled at the mention of the tiny race, while the princess turned to Vaati, open-mouthed in surprise.

"The mythical race from fairy tales?" Zelda exclaimed, "But they aren't real, are they?" The tales of the tiny Minish had once been popular hundreds of years ago, but now the stories were rarely told. Zelda only knew about it because Impa had a habit of telling her all sorts of folktales and legends in and around Hyrule, but never once did she imagine that the Minish were a real race. She'd only assumed that they were fun tales meant to encourage kids to behave, since the stories went that the Minish only appeared to kindhearted children.

Zelda saw something dart away from the corner of her eye, and when she turned around it was too late: Vaati had dashed off towards the broken window with surprising speed and hopped out into the night.

"Vaati!" she shouted, running towards the window. She caught sight of his small silhouette hopping across the tiles of the castle roof below.

Zelda gritted her teeth, and before Impa could stop her, she transformed into the lithe-figured Sheik and slipped through the broken window and after Vaati. "Sorry Impa, I have to go," he said quickly before vanishing.

Alone in Zelda's room, Impa shook her head sadly as she looked out the window. She felt at a loss on how to help her now two charges. She never would have expected it a year ago, but she felt responsible for Vaati now, too. He wasn't the same evil sorcerer who'd terrorized Hyrule anymore, but a brash child who reminded her of Zelda in some ways.

Impa ran her hand along her face, and she slowly walked back to sit down in the chair. If her guess was right that the princess had shared her Triforce to save the sorcerer's life, thenâ€¦

She truly wanted to save both of them, but she wasn't sure if there was a way. And if there wasn'tâ€¦

Impa's fingers lingered against the red Sheikah paint along her left eye.

I am sorry that I wasn't there to help you two.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Sheik was much faster now that he didn't have to wear a billowy dress, and he wished he could have been himself back when they'd confronted the masked man's accomplice. However, after hearing Impa talk about the dangerous Fused Shadow, perhaps it had been a good thing that they'd let him go for now, because they certainly weren't ready to face something so powerful without preparations.

It didn't take him long to catch up to Vaati, who'd scampered to the end of the slanted tiles of the roof below the main tower. He was perched on the edge of the roof with his fingers curled into tiny fists as he looked down at the faintly glowing torch light from Castle Town in the distance. Sheik approached him cautiously, unsure if his presence was welcome.

Vaati's ears twitched at the sound of Sheik's footsteps, but he continued to keep his back turned to him. He said nothing, pointedly ignoring the Sheikah as he angrily glared out at the world.

Sheik stopped several paces away, far enough to allow Vaati some privacy but close enough to let him know that he was there if he needed him. Sheik crouched atop the roof, perched on his toes while he waited patiently.

Sure enough, Vaati addressed him first; he wasn't very good at staying quiet for long if he had something to say. "What are you doing here?" he growled, turning his chin slightly, but still with his back turned.

"I said something that upset you," Sheik replied. "You ran

off."

Vaati's nose wrinkled into an irritated snarl, and his silence suggested that what Sheik said wasn't wrong.

"I'm sor-"

"Quiet," Vaati snapped, interrupting him. He whirled around, and began to stomp over but stopped short when he realized that 'stomping over' no longer had the same effect now that he was only inches tall. He grimaced in frustration, and then he waved his paws at himself in defeat.

"You want to know why I look like this?" he hissed, disgust brimming in his voice.

"You don't have to tell me if you don't want to."

"Don't you dare pity me," Vaati snarled, baring his teeth. Then, embittered by how he was lashing out unfairly to Sheik, he turned back around to pace along the rooftop. He did this for a while until he couldn't take Sheik's patient silence any longer. Vaati's steps slowed until he was standing beside the crouching Sheikah, and he sat down next to him with a heavy sigh. He turned his head in shame, and his voice became a low, barely audible murmur. "It's because I used to be one. A Minish. Thisâ€| this is me."

Sheik didn't say anything, though his expression softened behind his cowl. He could tell that it took Vaati great difficulty to admit aloud that this tiny creature was something that he'd once been. Though Sheik had a hard time believing that the infamous Sorcerer of Winds had once been this harmless ball of fluff no taller than his thumb, he couldn't doubt Vaati's pained confession. He took a deep breath, and then he, too, extended his legs to sit down next to Vaati rather than keep his crouch.

Vaati smiled bitterly. "Go ahead. Laugh. I've long since passed the point of caring."

At this, Sheik lifted his head and turned towards the Minish with a frown. "I'm not going to laugh, Vaati," he said quietly. He noted the small tilt of Vaati's head, indicating that he was listening. "I understand not being happy with what you were born as. Believe me, I do."

Vaati didn't respond, but from the way his shoulders lowered slightly, Sheik could tell that he'd gotten through to him somehow. The two of them didn't say anything for a while, and watched the lights of the town go out one by one. It was getting late, and they should have retired a while ago, but too much had happened and neither of them could fall asleep any time soon. Vaati seemed as though he was going to stubbornly remain on the roof for a while longer, but he also never once asked Sheik to leave. They remained on the roof in somber silence until only a handful of lights remained flickering from the town.

"Sheik."

The Sheikah stirred from Vaati's sudden voice, raising his chin from the knee he'd been resting it on.

"I wasn't dead, was I?" Vaati asked.

Behind his cowl, Sheik's expression darkened, and his shadowed face turned away from the Minish to stare out at the night instead. He muted his feelings of guilt, so Vaati wouldn't sense it as well and figure out the truth.

He couldn't tell him.

Not now.

"I made sure that you weren't," he responded, without a single waver in his voice.

After all, that was all that mattered.

* * *

><p>fleets: ok things got a little heavy there maybe. i feel like i should have more to say here, but i don't. thank you so much for your comments and support, and i'm feeling a lot better about my writing now that we're back to sheik again! (i was actually feeling a little weird about my writing these past 1,2,3,4 chapters, but i always feel a little weird when a story's just starting so idk. your encouragement really helped me through it though!)<p>

**Serpent Tailed Angel: **(eep you saw my other message tho). ANYWAYS yeah I was thinking about that, and it was really hard to introduce a noticeable difference in Vaati's personality since Sheiky Zelda is not very emotional haha. Well, it takes a whole lot for them to get emotional whereas Vaati's like a constant rageball of bad decisions. We might see more explanation later maybe. Vaati's not really the type to go into a whole lot of detail about his past, and Sheik's not really the type to press for more info so we didn't get a whole lot in this chapter :O

**Ai Star: **Even if they did catch him, he would have been able to get away easily, so probably better now than later :3
>And yup you got it! :)<p>

**icfehr: **Hmm, I'm a little confused by your confusion. I guess your question is, why isn't sharing allowed? I was mostly inspired by how Twilight Princess handled this, in the scene where Zelda gives Midna the power of her Triforce to save her: TP Zelda puts her life on the line in that scene, and she disappears. I figured that, in this case where both parties remain, there has to be consequences (especially since I'm going by the assumption that mucking around with Life and Death is a much bigger deal than, say, granting someone the power of a super powerful god or something :P). The consequence in this case is that there's no such thing as saving someone from certain death: it has to be a life for a life, since all life is sacred. Hope this clears things up!

**AquilaMage: **Hahaha, Vaati has his priorities straight xD
>Zelda kind of figured out what was happening but she'll struggle with this some more, I bet. It's kind of difficult to show Zelda's emotions in Vaati since she's a very emotionally controlled person as Sheik :O<p>

**plum: **Ahhh thank you! I do like to keep people on their toes, so I'm always happy to hear that something was unexpected :)
>(eeep i'm trying really hard to but for some reason pacing myself is. really unexpectedly hard. there was a bit of a longer break this time so self control is hopefully getting better?)<p>

**Peregrine777: **And now real Sheik is in the house! They couldn't quite interrogate him, but we'll be seeing more of him soon don't you worry :3
>Thanks so much Peregrine!<p>

End
file.